A new booklet to give teachers information to help reduce the risk and effectively deal with gastrointestinal infections is being circulated to all primary and secondary schools in Wales.

Health Minister Dr Brian Gibbons will today [Friday, 27 October] launch the booklet Teach Germs a Lesson at Tir Morfa primary school, Port Talbot.

The booklet is part of the Welsh Assembly Government’s efforts to reduce the risk of E.Coli outbreaks and is part of its ongoing commitment to Health Challenge Wales, the national focus to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Wales.

Cleaning and Hygiene company Johnson Diversey is supporting the Assembly Government’s work to raise standards of hand hygiene by providing educational materials for schools to teach children how to wash their hands and encourage teachers, parents and carers to act as role models. The materials are being provided as part of Johnson Diversey’s response to Health Challenge Wales through their Bug Blasters initiative, which uses a group of character children can easily identify with to reinforce a serious message in a fun way.

Welcoming the support of Johnson Diversey Dr Gibbons said: “This is an excellent response from the private sector to Health Challenge Wales, and it will make our Teach Germs a Lesson all the more effective in getting children to wash their hands.”

The bilingual Teach Germs a Lesson booklet aims to give simple, practical advice to enable staff in primary and secondary schools to better understand infections, and what they can do reduce the risk of them occurring as well as what to do to reduce infections spreading.

A similar booklet, Mind the Germs, was sent to all playgroups, nurseries and other pre-school childcare settings in June. Following the positive feedback from this publication, Teach Germs a Lesson will reinforce the need for teachers and children to be aware of the need for good hygiene.

Dr Gibbons said: "A great deal of work has been done since the outbreak last year to make sure we learn the lessons and reduce the risk of it happening again.

"The report by the acting Chief Medical Officer earlier this year identified a series of measures that are needed to reduce the risk of a future E.Coli outbreak. Work is already under way to implement these recommendations.

"Key to that is the need to raise people's awareness of the importance of following basic hygiene rules.

"In June this year we launched Mind the Germs which aims to give simple, practical advice to help staff in nursery and pre-school settings to better understand infections, and what they ca
do to reduce the risk of them occurring as well as what to do to reduce infections spreading.

"Teach Germs a Lesson aims to build on this success. We know that in schools children are in close and frequent physical contact with each other, which are ideal conditions for infectious diseases to spread rapidly.

"This booklet reinforces the need to instill a culture of hand washing from an early age so that it becomes second nature to children. This is the simplest and most effective way of reducing the risk of spreading infection."

Education Minister Jane Davidson said the booklet provides guidance to teachers and childcare providers on what they can do to reduce the risk of infection.

"It highlights the need to check that schools and other settings are clean before children arrive and the importance of establishing a daily cleaning routine, including classrooms, play areas, toilets, kitchens, toys and other equipment. It also gives clear advice on teaching children about what they can do to reduce infection, like hand washing, covering their nose and mouth with a tissue when they sneeze and cough; and disposing of the tissue correctly.

"We hope that this leaflet will be useful for staff in helping to develop their own infection control procedures and policies to minimise the risk of infection."

Yolanda Wilcock, Marketing Director from Johnson Diversey, added: “Early learning forms the critical basis of the values children carry through into adulthood and the values that they pass on to the next generation. If we are really going to have an impact on society, teaching today’s 4-11 year olds the importance of good hand washing is key. I truly believe that Bug Blasters will deliver its promise to school children throughout in Wales as part of Health Challenge Wales, and not only encourage children to wash their hands but, will inspire them to share what they learn with others."

Dr Gibbons said: "The Public Inquiry, which is being led by Professor Hugh Pennington, is continuing to gather information for a thorough inquiry into the outbreak and its handling. This will also make recommendations on action that can help to protect people’s health."

Notes:

Health Minister Dr Brian Gibbons will launch the booklet Teach Germs a Lesson at Tir Morfa primary school, Port Talbot on Friday, 27 October at 1.30pm.

27 October, 2006