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## Children learn importance of hand washing through new book

Ask any parent or carer which questions they ask their children most often and the chances are that "have you washed your hands?" is high on the list.

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Now a new book has been created to actually show preschool aged children the bacteria which lurks on their hands, helping to visually reinforce the important hygiene message of washing their hands.

The book, *A Germ's Journey*, is the brainchild of microbiologist [Dr Katie Laird](#) and education expert [Dr Sarah Younie](#) of De Montfort University Leicester (DMU). As parents themselves they knew the importance of hand washing in preventing disease and communicating it at a young age.

*A Germ's Journey* includes illustrations which feature special thermochromic black paint. Once the child's hand is placed upon the paint, the microbes present appear on the hands in the book and the black paint vanishes.

Dr Laird, head of [DMU's Infectious Disease Research Group](#), said the idea was to introduce the concept of the 'invisible germ' to youngsters. She said: "Often children cannot understand that there are germs on their hands because they cannot see them.

"Working through the book they can see the germs appear and it also allows parents and carers to have the conversation around hand washing. It also demonstrates clean hands after washing hands. At the back of the book is information for the parent on how to interact with the book and teach their children about germs."

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The project was funded by the Society of Applied Microbiology to develop a prototype book and website. Some 1000 books have also be sponsored in order to work with children in the UK, Africa and India.

The book has now been taken on by Medina Publishing Ltd and a website ([www.agermsjourney.com](http://www.agermsjourney.com)) with games, downloads and parenting tips has been created for parents and teachers.

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This week, copies of A Germ's Journey will be available to give away at Leicester's Highcross shopping centre, as well as a number of activities. Highcross' community outreach programme WOTSpace allowed DMU to use the space.




Among those taking part was six year old Daisy Adams, from Arnesby. Mum Katie said of A Germ's Journey: "I think it's a great idea. She is quite aware of washing her hands but this is a creative way of teaching children and making it fun."




Copies of the book have also been distributed to preschools and nurseries, toddler stay and play groups and internationally, via a charity in Kenya.

A special health and hygiene workshop is being held in the Gandhi Ashram in India, which is supported by DMU's Square Mile India fund. Sessions are planned with teachers and health workers across the region to spread the healthy hands message.

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