Statewide Impact Statement: *Wash Your Paws, Georgia!* Handwashing Education Program

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Summary: UGA Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences and Georgia 4-H teach Georgia’s youth, parents, educators and child care providers the importance of handwashing and how to properly wash hands to reduce their risk of foodborne illnesses and infectious diseases such as flu and H1N1.

Situation: Gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses are common causes of absences from school and from work. Absences may result in lost time from work for parents and in substantial costs for physician visits and antibiotic treatment. Absences from school can have an adverse effect on a school’s ability to make adequate yearly progress. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), handwashing is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading germs, and to prevent both infectious diseases and foodborne illnesses. The Georgia Department of Community Health has stated that prevention of disease transmission through good handwashing policies for both students and staff should be constantly reinforced. School officials depend on Cooperative Extension to educate students about handwashing and the prevention of foodborne and infectious diseases.

Response: UGA Cooperative Extension Agents in Family and Consumer Sciences and 4-H implemented the *Wash Your Paws, Georgia!* curriculum in classrooms and clubs with youth audiences to teach proper handwashing technique and in programs with educators, parents and child care providers who in turn work with youth. They also educated families and consumers on this topic through local media.

Impact: Statewide, 33 educators, 63 child care providers, 678 other adults and 2,645 youth were reached with the *Wash Your Paws, Georgia!* Handwashing Education Program. Through media contacts, an additional 21,100 individuals may have been reached with handwashing education messages. Data from youth who completed pre-tests and post-tests in 2012 indicate that only 22% knew correct handwashing technique prior to the program. As a result of the program, 56% improved their knowledge of proper handwashing technique. These results are consistent with a previous study of the curriculum in which only 25% knew correct technique prior to the program and 49.4% improved their knowledge of handwashing technique as a result of the program.

Public Value of this Program:
- According to CDC, handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of disease, including infectious diseases such as flu and foodborne illnesses.
- Prevention of these diseases in a school environment reduces absenteeism and may help schools make adequate yearly progress.
- Prevention of these diseases may decrease lost time from work and lost wages for parents/guardians who must stay home with sick youth and potentially reduces
medical expenses resulting in more money available for parents to spend in local businesses supporting the economy of the community and the state.