Reviewer's report

Title: Hand hygiene instruction decreases illness-related absenteeism in elementary schools: a prospective cohort study

Version: 2 Date: 20 December 2011

Reviewer: Mary-Louise McLaws

Reviewer's report:

You have addressed my required points 1-15. However, you still need to be more open with your readers about the potentially serious confounders (every paper has confounders - the only sin is not admitting them to the readers who are novices). Authors must give more detail in the limitations sections:

1. the potential of English proficiency on the childrens' understanding
2. vaccination rates were unknown and vaccination may have been the primary driver of reduced infection (vaccination rates may be high across both arms resulting in the effect towards the null)
3. while random allocation may make all potential confounders equal in both groups the sample sizes in each arm were small hence the potential for siblings as a source of infection at home and not school students.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.