

## PE is no longer followed by shower — PU

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It is a great unspoken in American education — the demise of the gym-class shower.

Every day, in nearly every secondary school, millions of students slip into gym shorts for a period of tumbling, basketball, floor hockey, running, rope climbing or touch football. They return to their locker rooms, change back to their school clothes and take their places in algebra, biology, calculus and English classes — still stewing in perspiration and other pubescent scents. Showers are not part of the physical education curriculum in 21st century America.

In my day (God, I hate those three words), showers were mandatory before a return to class. For good and obvious reasons. Not so any more — also for good and obvious reasons, not least of which is the ubiquitous presence of cell phone cameras.

I have been aware of this culture change since my own boys started middle school. But I was

not sure how universal the showerless gym class had become and I didn't want to make something of an anecdote.

But recently I received a spam e-mail for a new product called Qwik Shower gym class wipes, manufactured by a company called My Kids Stink LLC (no joke). Says the e-promotion:

"With today's active kids more time-pressed than ever, showering after gym class, sports or other physical activity has gone by the wayside. This leaves dirty, sweaty and stinky children to go about their day, looking bad and smelling even worse! Throw puberty into the mix and the olfactory offense is taken to new heights — often an embarrassing blow to kids' self-esteem." The fix is the company's "large, moist, single-use disposable cloths with a subtle 'teenager-approved' scent and economical price point." (Yes, there's a website: [www.QwikShower.com](http://www.QwikShower.com))

The trend away from showers is real, says Tom Stewart, the director of athletics and physical education for the Rush-Henrietta schools. Except for kids coming out of the swimming pool, who often shower on their way to the locker room, the PE shower is a thing of the past, he says. "I've been here 11 years, Stewart says, "and it was long gone before I got

here."

Any student who wants to take a shower certainly may do so, he says, but it's not required and rarely requested.

Indeed, very often student athletes do not shower either. "A lot of times kids change after a practice or game and go home to shower," says David Green, the director of health, physical education and athletics for the West Irondequoit school district. The exception, Green and Stewart say, are the wrestlers who, because of the physical contact that is part of the sport, are strongly encouraged to shower and use anti-bacterial or disinfectant sprays as well.

In many schools, Stewart says, the showers have been converted to storage rooms. "The culture has changed," he says, "We still have gang showers and kids aren't comfortable using them."

Kids come out of PE class or a practice and douse themselves with deodorant or body sprays. It's not the same. Blame it on modesty, or peer pressure, or time constraints, or cell phone cameras.

But if you've ever had to transport two or three runners after track practice, you can only imagine what it's like to have 15 of them in front of you in 5th period math class. □

