



Guidance on Handwashing

Why Wash Hands?

Harmful bacteria, parasites and viruses such as Salmonella, Giardia and Hepatitis A can be carried in our bodies or on things we touch (pets, raw animal foods, or contaminated utensils). It is estimated that 1 in 50 foodservice workers has diarrhea or is recovering from illness. A review of United States surveillance data for the period 1988 – 1992 shows that over 35% of foodborne outbreaks for which contributing factors were reported, had poor personal hygiene as a contributing factor. Therefore, effective handwashing is critical in preventing the spread of disease.

How Can Foodborne Illnesses be Reduced?

1. Exclude sick workers:

Workers with infected cuts, or suffering from diarrhea or vomiting must be excluded from food contact activities and should be directed to visit their doctor.

2. Wash hands:

Not all individuals who are infected by a foodborne pathogen exhibit symptoms. Therefore, all food handlers should wash their hands to ensure that disease is not transmitted from them to food.

To thoroughly wash your hands you need to:

1. Rinse hands under warm running water to remove heavy soils. Heavy soils can be defined as soil that is visible to the naked eye.

2. Wash hands under warm running water using soap. A vigorous circular rubbing action on the hands is needed to break soil and bacteria free from the hands. A soft brush is also recommended for scrubbing the fingertips and under the nails as these areas are often heavily contaminated and are difficult to reach.

Proper handwashing causes bacteria to be rubbed from the hands, and suspended in the lather. Therefore, lather development is an important aspect of handwashing.

3. Rinse the hands under warm running water to remove the lather. The lather carries the harmful bacteria into the handwash station. Properly installed drains carry the bacteria into the sanitary sewers and away from the food environment.

When Should Hands be Washed?

Hands should be thoroughly washed before starting work and after using the washroom. Further, hands should be washed before handling ready-to-eat foods, and after touching anything that might contaminate the hands, particularly raw foods of animal origin. Washed hands should be dried with clean paper towels.

My Hands Get Dry and Crack from Frequent Handwashing.

Unfortunately, hands may suffer from frequent handwashing. However, there are products available such as gloves, barrier creams and lotions that will protect your skin. You may wish to ask your hand soap supplier about such products.

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As a cautionary note, some people can develop serious allergies to some products. For instance, some individuals develop allergies to latex. Therefore, do not insist on the use of latex gloves, or other allergenic materials, but encourage any activity that will protect food from contamination. Alternatives to gloves might be tongs, spoons, napkins or spatulas.

Remember, gloves, barrier creams and lotions do not replace timely handwashing as they may become contaminated just like hands. Further, gloves must be maintained and changed frequently as pinholes may cause the glove to leak a bacterial “soup” into the food.

Are Antibacterial Soaps or Creams Recommended?

No, antibacterial soaps or creams are no longer recommended. The antibiotic agents in soaps and creams affect the naturally occurring bacteria on skin, and can increase resistance to antibiotics¹. This becomes a problem when you require a course of antibiotics for infection.

Use plain soap. Plain soap will remove the dirt and grease that attract bad bacteria and viruses. Plain soap does not promote antibiotic resistance in the bacteria that normally live on our hands or in our environment.

Antibacterial soap is not recommended for several reasons. Antibiotics generally take a lot longer to work than the time it takes to wash your hands. By constantly exposing the bacteria to these antibacterial products, bacteria can become resistant. The resistance can then be transferred to other bacteria including the bad, disease-causing bacteria.

There is no need to use antibacterial products as plain soap and proper handwashing can remove the germs very effectively.

Can Hand Dips Replace Handwashing?

No! Hand dips may have their place in certain situations in a food establishment. However, they do not provide for the critical handwashing steps including a strong flow of warm running water, scrubbing, lather development, and a drain to carry wastewater away. As such, hand dips cannot replace timely handwashing.

In addition, hand dips may become a reservoir for hand contamination. Dirty hands may contaminate the hand dips. The soils from those hands may inactivate the chemical sanitizers. The hand dips may now create a medium in which harmful bacteria can grow. Therefore, hand dips need to be dumped and replenished on a frequent basis so that they do not become a source of contamination.

Is Bare Hand Contact With Food Recommended?

Alternative food contact devices such as spoons, spatula's, tongs or napkins are preferred. However, some operations may require the direct use of hands in contact with food. Under such circumstances - effective handwashing is a must!

For more information on handwashing visit the *Do Bugs Need Drugs* website

www.dobugsneeddrugs.org

References

¹ – Yazhankhan SP, et al. Microb Drug Resist. 2006;12(2):83-90.

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