



## Restaurant Operational RESOURCES



# EMPLOYEE HANDWASHING

## *Creating a Handwashing Culture at Your Restaurant*

Obviously proper hand washing is critical in the prevention of foodborne illnesses.

Handwashing is the most effective means of preventing the spread of bacteria and viruses. Proper handwashing can prevent contamination of food, utensils and equipment.

It's surprising to learn how few people are actually properly washing their hands. According to a 2013 study conducted by Michigan State University researchers, only five percent of the people they observed in public restrooms washed their hands long enough to kill infection-causing germs and bacteria! As an employer of food handlers, that statistic should concern you.

The study revealed some interesting information. The twelve undercover researchers were posted in public restrooms located across a college town for the study. They observed more than 3,700 people using public restrooms, and found 95 percent of them were cutting corners. Thirty-three percent of people didn't use soap, while 10 percent skipped hand-washing entirely. The average hand-washing time was 6 seconds, far below the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) recommended duration of 20 seconds (a good reminder is singing the Happy Birthday song twice).

Men were much worse than women, the researchers observed. Fifteen percent

of men didn't wash at all, compared with 7 percent of women. When they did wash, 50 percent of men used soap, compared to 79 percent of women.

Other factors may have contributed to these rates: People were more likely to skip hand-washing if the sink was dirty, and they were more likely to wash earlier in the day. The researchers also found that signs telling people to wash their hands were effective, with people less likely to wash in the absence of a sign.

"These findings were surprising to us because past research suggested that proper hand washing is occurring at a much higher rate," said lead investigator Carl Borchgrevink, an associate professor of hospitality business at Michigan State University in East Lansing (he is a former chef and restaurant manager). This is no small matter. Borchgrevink points out that the spread of foodborne illness through the fecal-oral route could cost you your business!

Although this study didn't focus on restaurant employees, it dramatically underscores just how few people properly wash their hands. You can't assume that your employees 1) know how to properly wash their hands and 2) actually make it a practice even if they do know how **and** when it should be done.

The spread of bad bugs from the hands of food workers to food is an important cause of foodborne illness

outbreaks in restaurants. **It accounts for 89% of outbreaks in which food was contaminated by food workers.** Proper handwashing can reduce bad bugs on employees' hands and the spread of germs from hands to food and from food to other people.

Wisconsin's Food Code (based on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Food Code) outlines when food workers must wash their hands.

### **FDA Oral Culture Learner Project - Educational Materials for Retail Food Employees**

FDA's Oral Culture Learner Project provides materials and methods to help food employees understand the reasons why following proper food safety practices is important to prevent illnesses, deaths and loss of income and reputation resulting from food-related outbreaks. The materials have been designed for oral culture learners, which research has shown most food employees to be.

Visit [www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/IndustryandRegulatoryAssistanceandTrainingResources/ucm212661.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/IndustryandRegulatoryAssistanceandTrainingResources/ucm212661.htm) to place an order for the posters/storyboards and to view videos.

### When to wash your hands:

- Before starting to work with food, utensils or equipment
- Before putting on gloves
- During food preparation, as often as needed, and when changing task
- When switching between raw foods and ready-to-eat foods
- After handling soiled utensils and equipment
- After coughing, sneezing or using a tissue
- After eating, drinking or using tobacco products
- After touching your skin, face or hair
- After handling service animals, fish in aquariums, or molluscan shellfish or crustacea in display tanks
- After using the toilet (wash hands at a handwash sink in the restroom, and again when returning to work area)

### Where to wash your hands:

- Only wash your hands in sinks designated for handwashing
- Do not wash your hands in utensil, food preparation, or service sinks

The CDC addressed the problem of food handlers failing to wash their hands correctly and as often as needed in a hand-hygiene study conducted in 2007. The findings are available at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)—search for Food Worker Handwashing and Restaurant Factors, but to summarize: Research on handwashing (and glove use) in restaurants shows that these practices do not occur as often as they should.



### Don't Forget About Utensils!

There are many types of utensils that can serve as an alternate to bare hand contact when preparing ready-to-eat foods. Think, not just single-use gloves which are defined as a utensil in the Food Code, but also deli papers, spatulas, tongs, toothpicks, forks and ladles, scoops and chopsticks. The Conference for Food Protection has an excellent Powerpoint that gives an extensive overview of smart utensil usage. Visit [www.foodprotect.org](http://www.foodprotect.org) and search for "Barriers to Bare Hand Contact"

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The CDC interviewed and watched food workers in order to collect data and learned that food workers were more likely to wash their hands when they were supposed to when they were not busy and in restaurants with: food-safety training; more than one hand sink; and a hand sink where workers could see it.

Workers wearing gloves when handwashing should occur were less likely to wash their hands at that point than were workers who were not wearing gloves at that point. This suggests that glove use may lead to less handwashing.

Sink accessibility was directly related to handwashing, which suggests that sink accessibility promotes handwashing. Similarly, glove accessibility is related to glove use.

A more recent CDC study showed that restaurant employees who don't wash their hands are the most common

source of norovirus outbreaks that sicken hundreds of thousands of people every year. Norovirus typically leads to several days of misery in the form of vomiting and diarrhea for the estimated one in 15 people throughout the U.S. who are infected every year.

The CDC found that those symptoms require hospitalizations for 56,000-71,000 people every year and cause 570-800 deaths. The CDC studied 1,008 food-borne Norovirus outbreaks between 2009-2012. Restaurants were the most common place where the outbreaks occurred. Investigators traced the outbreak to food workers in 70 percent of those cases. The best way to prevent outbreaks? In fancy terms "Improved adherence to appropriate hand hygiene," the CDC says, but in simple language "wash your hands." **WR**

Here's the right way to wash your hands (and again, don't assume your employees know this!)

### Six Steps to Handwashing

1. Remove any jewelry and then wet hands with warm water.
2. Using soap, not a hand sanitizer solution, work up a soapy lather that covers hands and forearms.
3. Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds. Make sure to wash palms, back of hands, between fingers and up the forearms.
4. Use a fingernail brush to clean under fingernails and between fingers.
5. Rinse hands and forearms in warm water.
6. Dry hands with single-use paper towels. Turn off the faucet with wrist/forearms or with paper towels to prevent re-contamination of hands.

### Get your staff on board/New posters available

To help you encourage your staff to wash their hands, we recommend training new employees on proper handwashing techniques. Take them to a sink and do a demo. It may seem awkward, but awkward beats a Norovirus outbreak any day. Also, you can be cited for Food Code violations if sinks aren't stocked with soap, towels, etc. Make that part of an employee's job responsibilities. Make good handwashing easier for employees to do correctly.

WRA has created several new handwashing posters so you'll have more options in your business. Visit Members Only on the WRA website to download them. [www.wirerestaurant.org](http://www.wirerestaurant.org)

