

CRACKING THE CODE:

WHY WE WASH OUR HANDS



In the foodservice industry, we're often told when, where, and even how to wash our hands. **But not many people understand the science behind why we wash our hands.** To illustrate the importance of washing up, let's look at how germs are spread from hands to food.

JOURNEY OF A GERM



GERMS CAN BE FOUND VIRTUALLY EVERYWHERE.

Most germs are harmless, although some germs are pathogenic and can cause illness in humans. Unless they exist in large enough numbers, these pathogens largely go undetected.



OUR HANDS TOUCH HUNDREDS OF OBJECTS AND SURFACES EVERY DAY, and the germs from these objects are easily transferred onto our hands. In fact, our hands carry on average 3,200 different germs belonging to more than 150 species.



WHEN WE TOUCH FOOD OR SURFACES THAT COME IN CONTACT WITH FOOD, we transfer our germs onto that food. If someone is sick or has pathogens on their hands, the food they touch has the potential to spread foodborne illnesses.

WHY WE WASH OUR HANDS

Washing our hands with soap and water removes potentially dangerous germs from our hands. **Handwashing helps reduce the spread of foodborne illness by:**



KEEPING YOURSELF HEALTHY

When we touch our eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands, we increase our chances of getting sick. The number one contributor to foodborne illness outbreaks in restaurants is transmission through a sick food handler.



KEEPING THOSE AROUND YOU HEALTHY

We can spread harmful germs through direct contact like a handshake or by touching surfaces or utensils that will be used by someone else. Food service workers who display signs of illness should be sent home to recover.



PREVENTING FOOD CONTAMINATION

Germs from unwashed hands can transfer to the things we touch, including food. These germs can multiply in certain foods, leading to contamination. Many foodborne illnesses are spread by food handlers not handwashing after using the bathroom.

HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS, AND WHY

STEP 1

Wet your hands and arms with running water.

Why? Placing your hand in contaminated still water could re-contaminate your hands.



STEP 2

Apply enough soap to build up a lather.

Why? Lathering makes the soap easier to spread and creates friction, which helps loosen grease and dirt.



STEP 3

Vigorously scrub your hands and arms for at least 20 seconds. Clean your fingertips, under your fingernails, and between your fingers.

Why? Studies show that washing hands for about 20 seconds removes more germs from hands than washing for shorter periods.



STEP 4

Rinse hands and arms thoroughly under running water.

Why? The dirt, grease, and microbes loosed from scrubbing should be washed off the hands.



STEP 5

Dry hands and arms with a single-use paper towel or hand dryer. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet. If leaving the restroom, use a paper towel to open the door.

Why? Germs transfer more easily onto wet hands. Touching a contaminated surface after washing your hands could re-contaminate them.



For more cracking the code facts on food safety and other helpful resources, **visit foodsafetyfocus.com.**

¹ Pfizer. (2023). How Clean Are Your Hands?

² CDC. (2017, August 25). Infographic Contributing Factors: Preventable Causes of Foodborne Illness.

³ CDC. (2021, August 10). Show Me the Science – How to Wash Your Hands.