

It turns out your mom was right about washing your hands. According to the Handwashing for Life Institute, handwashing—or lack thereof—is now the biggest single threat to serving safe food. Effective washing, rinsing and drying of hands is up to 99.9% effective in preventing the transmission of infectious diseases, and could potentially reduce disease rates by 30-40% and save a million lives annually. “The industry has done so much to address the problems of temperature control and other risks associated with foodborne illness,” sighs Jim Mann, executive director of Handwashing for Life (HFL), an industry alliance committed to the reduction of foodborne illness. “Now, if only we could get people to wash their hands correctly.”

The dirty truth is, many foodservice operations are out of compliance on hand hygiene issues (see page 6). And it may seem like such a simple task, but many food handlers don't know when or how to wash their hands. Time for a quick refresher.



HANDWASHING—OR LACK THEREOF—IS NOW THE BIGGEST SINGLE THREAT TO SERVING SAFE FOOD. EFFECTIVE WASHING, RINSING AND DRYING OF HANDS IS UP TO **99.9% EFFECTIVE** IN PREVENTING DISEASE TRANSMISSION

WHEN

Every organization must set its own standards for how often handwashing should take place—Jack in the Box calls for handwashing on the hour, and there's an audio cue to remind workers that it's time. At the bare minimum, however, handwashing should occur as a result of the following: arrival on the job; pre- and post-break; restroom use; task change; pre- and post-gloving; facial/hair touch; sneeze or cough; customer contact; departure.

HOW LONG

Most experts agree that hands should be washed for a minimum of 20 seconds, using running warm water (98-110°F.) and liquid soap; prewetting enhances the process. Lather every surface thoroughly, especially around the nails. Rinse with warm running water.

EQUIPMENT

First, you need a sink. The location or locations should be convenient, yet out of traffic. Stainless steel is ideal, as it's easier to clean than other surfaces. Seamless construction is preferred, with a deep draw

bowl and a splashguard to prevent cross-contamination.

Automatic touch-free faucets are faster, and also help control cross-contamination; otherwise, staff should turn off the handles with the paper towel they used to dry their hands. Waste receptacles should be strategically located; in washrooms, they should be convenient to both the sink and the exit door, so that a worker can

use a paper towel to protect recontamination from door handles, then toss the soiled towel.

SUPPLIES

◆ **Choose liquid soap** formulated for the soils and foodborne pathogens associated with your environment, and locate the soap as near to the faucet as possible. Avoid harsh chemicals, in order to encourage frequent washing and promote skin health; antibacterial properties are not essential for effective results. Use a bagged airless system to keep pathogens out of the dispenser. Touch-free dispensing and built-in counting systems are helpful; so is the addition of a second, backup dispenser, to help prevent running out

◆ **A nail brush** helps remove pathogens that may be trapped beneath nails and around the cuticle. Choose brushes made of nonabsorbent materials, and fused (rather than stapled) bristles. Run nail brushes through the dishwasher at the end of

every shift to enhance cleanliness, and replace frequently

◆ **Single-use paper towels** are preferable to blowers in the food-handling environment, because they are both fast and effective (their texture helps to brush off any residual germs); consider touch-free dispensers to minimize cross-contamination

◆ **Single-use gloves** lower food-handling risk; choose glove style and material to fit the task (i.e., form-fit vinyl or synthetic for high-dexterity, loose-fit poly for frequent changes), get them in the proper sizes for your staff, and have them readily available at work stations

◆ **Alcohol sanitizers** can boost handwashing effectiveness, and while they don't meet the FDA requirement for a hand wash, they're better than nothing at a remote site location (sanitize thoroughly and wipe aggressively with paper towels before the alcohol evaporates, then repeat sanitizing and allow hands to air-dry)

THE SCRUB CLUB

NSF International has joined with the Partnership for Food Safety Education www.fightbac.org to launch The Scrub Club, a new annual handwashing initiative aimed at children and their teachers and parents. The new program is designed to help protect children from dangerous foodborne illnesses as well as infectious diseases by educating them about the importance of washing their hands the right way.

