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by experts in the field of liver
disease

HCV Wellness: Hand Washing: A Primer

Alan Franciscus, Editor-in-Chief

What is the best disease prevention strategy available? If you were to say handwashing – you would be right! It is easy to understand how handwashing can prevent disease transmission, but this wasn't always the case. In fact, it wasn't until 1847 that handwashing was proven to prevent disease. In the first study of its kind, Dr. Ignatz Semmelweis was able to demonstrate that puerperal fever, also called "child-bed fever," transmission could be greatly reduced from 13% to 2% by hand washing. Over the years, hand washing has become standard practice to prevent many diseases.

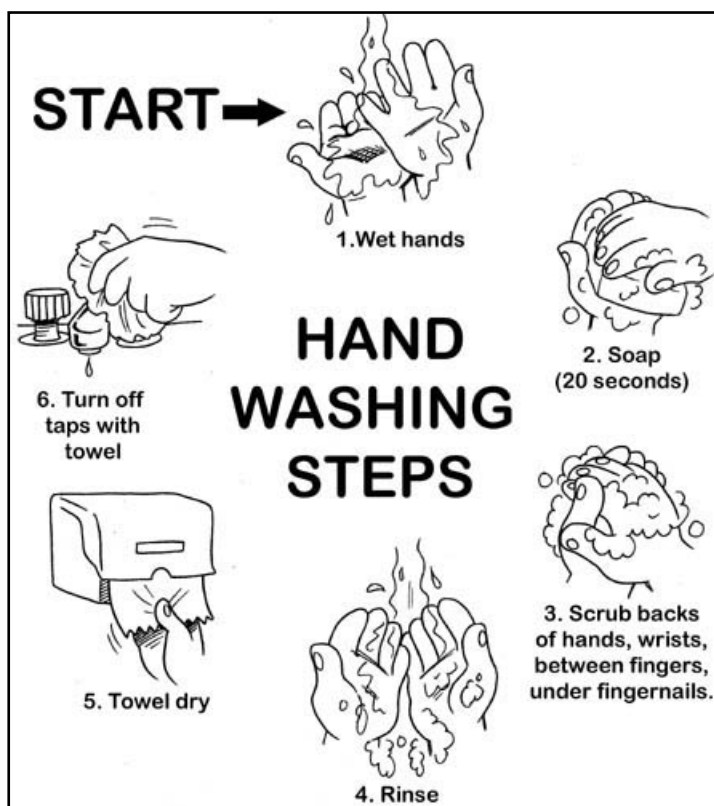
Two of the most common types of food-borne illnesses that can be prevented by handwashing are salmonella and E coli. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimate that every year about 76 million Americans will come down with and 5,000

Americans will die from a food-borne illness. It is also possible to get the flu, common cold, gastrointestinal disorders and even hepatitis A from a hand that has not been washed after exposure.

After all the research over the years and many public health campaigns to teach people why, how and when to wash their hands you would think that every American would wash their hands especially after using the toilet – right? Wrong – a surprising number of Americans especially men don't regularly wash their hands after using the toilet.

A study conducted in 2007 by the American Society for Microbiology and The Soap and Detergent Association found that 92% Americans interviewed via the telephone self-reported that they washed in public restrooms. But, as usual, direct observation paints a much different picture.

In the direct observational part of the study, conducted in public restrooms in 4 cities – Atlanta, Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco – attendants were stationed in the restrooms to observe the hand washing habits of 6,076 adults who used the toilets. The researchers found that 88% of women actually washed their hands compared to only 66% of men. Breaking it down by city – Chicago



was the best at handwashing with 81%, followed by New York City (79%), Atlanta (75%) and San Francisco (73%).

When to Wash Your Hands

- After using the toilet
- After changing a diaper
- After petting or touching an animal or any animal waste
- Before preparing food
- Before and after handling raw meat, poultry or fish
- Prior to eating
- After blowing the nose
- After coughing or sneezing into the hands
- Before and after treating wounds or cuts
- Before and after touching a person who is sick or injured
- After handling garbage
- Before touching the eyes, such as when inserting or removing contact lens
- When using any public restroom
- Whenever there is a risk of transmitting an illness

Soap and Water

Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid or reduce the use of antibacterial soaps because overuse could potentially lead to the development of bacteria that are resistant to these cleaning agents.

- Wash your hands thoroughly by rubbing hands and fingers together for at least 20 seconds – make sure that you get the backs of the hands, wrists, fingernails, and between the fingers. In other words, make sure that the entire hand is rubbed, scrubbed and cleaned. (See illustration)
- Rinse your hands in water
- Dry your hands with a clean towel and use the same towel to turn off the faucet or open

the door. You can also use cloth towels and an automatic warm air hand dryer

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers that don't require water:

- Squeeze about ½ teaspoon into the palm of the hand
- Rub your hands together to make sure all surfaces are covered

Use sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Don't forget to use hand moisturizer regularly since frequent hand washing can leave the hands dry and irritated.

Sources:


- Centers for Disease Control, and hand washing recommendations from the Mayo Clinic.
- Illustration: La Crosse County, Wisconsin, Department of Health <http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/Health/Environmental/Images/Handwashing/handwashing%20steps.jpg>

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