

Food Safety: It's in Your Hands!

“Wash your hands.”

Do you remember hearing your mother tell you this when you were young? It is still good advice. We know that our hands can carry harmful bacteria. Think about all the things you touch throughout the day:

- Food, including raw meat
- Tables, desks, and other countertops
- Pets
- Cars
- Children
- Dirty diapers
- Runny noses
- Cigarettes
- Toilet seats and handles
- Doorknobs

Because bacteria are everywhere they are on our bodies, too. We spread bacteria by constantly touching our hair, nose, and face. It is, therefore, important to wash our hands frequently.

When Is It Important To Wash Your Hands?

Wash Your Hands After

1. Using the bathroom
2. Handling raw foods such as meats, poultry, fruits, and vegetables
3. Changing a baby's diaper
4. Sneezing and coughing

Using the Bathroom

Washing your hands after using the bathroom seems simple enough, but few people realize how important it is. Many types of bacteria live in the feces of animals and humans. This includes some of the most deadly bacteria such as E. coli 0157:H7. Some people can even carry the organism without becoming ill themselves, but when they pass the organism to someone else that person can become quite ill. The best way to remove these bacteria is by washing your hands.

Handling Raw Foods

You probably realize the need to wash your hands after handling raw meats and poultry, but what about after handling raw fruits and vegetables? In addition to pesticides, microorganisms can be found on the surface of fresh produce. Bacteria are everywhere—in the air and in the soil; it is easy for these bacteria to get on fruits and vegetables. One major way bacteria get on fruits and vegetables is from animals in the fields. Deer, rabbits, even rats and mice come to eat the food and leave behind their feces. These feces are deposited in the soil. When it rains, they are splashed onto the produce. When you handle the raw foods, your hands can become contaminated.

Changing a Baby's Diaper

As sweet as babies are, they still can have bacteria in their feces. Always wash your hands after changing a diaper. It is also a good practice to wipe off your hands with a damp paper towel after discarding the dirty diaper and before you put on the clean one. This will help prevent cross contamination of the bacteria in the baby's diaper.

Sneezing and Coughing

Have you ever thought about why your nose runs? Sometimes it is caused by an allergic reaction and bacteria are not involved. When you have a cold, it is caused by an infection. Colds are the result of a viral infection. Whenever you wipe your nose with your hands, you can spread the virus to whatever you touch.

Wash Your Hands Before

1. Eating or drinking
2. Handling a baby
3. Preparing food

Eating or Drinking

As already mentioned, bacteria are everywhere. The skin has many types of bacteria living on it that we cannot see. They are so small that millions can be on our hands without our knowing it and can easily be passed to the food we prepare.

Handling a Baby

Because babies are so little they are the most susceptible to bacterial infections. For this reason you should wash your hands before handling a baby. It is especially important to wash your hands before you handle any food for babies, especially their bottles.

Preparing Food

We always think about washing our hands after handling food, but what about before? Some foods, such as canned foods, are free from bacteria before you eat them. Touching them with dirty hands can cause contamination.

Where Should You Wash Your Hands?

You should wash your hands in a hand-washing sink where food is not being prepared. Never use the kitchen sink to wash your hands after you have been doing something in another area of the house and enter the kitchen to start cooking. Of course, after you have washed your hands and started the cooking process, you will rinse and wash your hands many times throughout the cooking of a meal. The kitchen sink can become contaminated if you wash your hands there after using the bathroom. The bacteria can then be introduced to foods such as lettuce and tomatoes that may be placed in the sink. Make it a household practice to wash your hands in the bathroom sink before starting the cooking process.

During food preparation, your hands can become soiled and wet. Always wash them when they become soiled and especially after handling raw meat or poultry. Dry your hands with a towel for hand drying only. Do not use the same towel that you would use to dry clean dishes or to dry the counter. A damp, hand-drying towel may contain bacteria that can grow to millions after several hours.

How Should You Wash Your Hands?



1) Turn on the water.



2) Wet your hands.



3) Get the soap.



4) Work up a good lather.



5) Work the lather all over your hands, rubbing and lathering for at least 20 seconds making sure to clean under your fingernails.



6) If you have a nailbrush, scrub your nails. If not, cup your hands when they are fully lathered and place your fingertips in the cup of lather in your palm and scrub. Repeat with both hands.



7) Dry your hands on a clean towel. Remember, a dirty towel will only get your clean hands dirty again.



8) Or, pull off a paper towel.



9) Dry your hands with the paper towel.