



Producing Quality Food On-Farm



The Importance of Washing Hands Properly

Why is Hand Washing Important

A US survey found that 36% of food borne disease outbreaks caused by an outside influence were due to poor personal hygiene. In another survey, 94% of the people claimed to wash their hands after using the bathroom, but when observed only 68% actually did.

We can pass germs onto food, each other and ourselves. Washing your hands with warm (if possible), running water and soap can reduce disease transmission, food born illnesses, and worker pesticide and fertilizer exposure. The mechanical action of scrubbing loosens dirt and microbes on our hands and soap picks them up, kills microbes and helps water wash them away.

How to Set-up a Hand Washing Station

Hand washing stations must be placed in a convenient and accessible location. They should be close to toilets and, ideally, no more than a 5-minute walk from work areas. Hand washing stations must be kept clean and sanitary, have potable water and soap and be maintained regularly. A good rule of thumb is to have 1 hand washing station per 20 employees.

The Minimum Requirements of an Inside or Outside Field Station

- running potable water,
- soap,
- individual, single-service towels, and,
- a garbage can.

A processing or packaging hand washing station should also have hot and cold running potable water that is turned on automatically or by a foot pedal.

Washing your hands is the most important step in food safety.



January 2002

The Importance of Washing Hands Properly 2

Which Soap?

Plain hand soaps and antimicrobial hand soaps are both equally effective. Instant hand sanitizers can be used in conjunction with other soaps but should not be used on their own as any organic matter on the hands (soil, juice, etc) can make them ineffective.

How to Wash Hands

Properly washing your hands is the most critical step in any hygiene program and quite often the most neglected step. To properly remove the bacteria the following steps must be followed.

- Wet hands with warm (if possible), running, potable water
- Use enough soap to generate a good lather/foam
- Vigorously rub hands together for about 20 seconds – scrubbing between fingers, on the tops and palms of hands and around the wrists
- Rinse hands under warm, running, potable water
- Pat hands dry with a clean single use towel
- If the tap does not turn off automatically, use the towel as a barrier between your hands and the taps
- Discard towel in the garbage can
- If using gloves, wash hands before putting them on and after removing them. Gloves should not be used as a replacement for washing hands, although they do reduce transfer of bacteria from hands to food.



The Importance of Washing Hands Properly 3

When Should You Wash Your Hands?

Before you:

- Handle (pick, package, prepare, eat) food
- Insert or remove contact lenses
- Tend someone who is sick or injured
- Put your fingers in your ears, eyes, nose, etc

After you:

- Use the bathroom
- Handle garbage
- Eat meals and snacks
- Touch raw meat, poultry, fish or eggs
- Touch an animal or animal waste
- Tend someone who is sick or injured
- Touch body fluids (vomit, saliva, mucus, etc) or put your fingers in your ears, eyes, nose, etc

Train Employees

Workers must be taught the microbial risks involved in your operation. Do not assume that they or the public know how to wash their hands properly. Show them and insist that all workers wash their hands before handling food and after going to the bathroom. Post signs to outline the proper steps to help establish good habits.

Personal hygiene is an essential part of everyone's commitment to producing safe & healthy food.

Other Related Information Resources...

Factsheet – Providing Practical & Sanitary Field Toilets
Poster – Please Wash Your Hands

For More Information on On-Farm Food Quality & Safety Contact...

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