FOOD SCIENCE
FACT SHEET

This Food Science Fact Sheet is one of a series compiled by Institute of Food Science and Technology, providing clear, concise and scientifically reliable information on key food science topics for consumers.

Hand Hygiene

Why should you wash your hands?

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps anyone can take to avoid becoming ill and spreading microorganisms to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean, running water.

People handling food have a particular responsibility to protect the health of those for whom they are providing food. They must keep their hands clean!

How to wash your hands?

Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm enough for comfort), turn off the tap, and apply soap.

Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the tips of your fingers and thumbs, the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.

Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end. Twice.

Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.

Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

Did you know?

Wet hands are 5000 times more likely to pick up microorganisms than dry.

'Wet hands are 5000 times more likely to pick up microorganisms than dry.'

Myth Busting
Water temperature directly affects hand washing efficacy

Not true. The temperature of water does not directly contribute to the removal of microorganisms. Water would need to be too hot for comfort if it was to kill organisms directly. When washing hands, water should be warm enough for comfort as a comfortable temperature encourages more thorough hand washing.

Hand Hygiene

Myth Busting
You don't have to wash your hands if you wear gloves

Not true. Gloves are not a substitute for hand hygiene. Some people handling food choose to wear gloves because they may not wish to handle a certain food type e.g. pork.

A glove is just another food contact surface. As they can become dirty and contaminated by bacteria, they must be changed frequently to prevent build-up of microorganisms or food. Gloves must not be worn for handling both food and other objects, for example money.

You must wash your hands thoroughly before putting on gloves. Tears or other damage will expose the hand which may then contaminate whatever is being handled.

If gloves are not worn correctly, they may compromise food hygiene by:

- encouraging a false sense of security resulting in reduced washing frequency, leading to a build-up of contamination on gloves — by contrast, unwashed hands will feel unpleasant, encouraging more frequent washing
- leading to less safe hand washing practices unless thorough hand washing regimes are enforced

'Gloves are not a substitute for hand hygiene.'

References

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Hand washing: **http://www.chilledfood.org/hand-washing/**