



COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE • COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENCY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN NO. 02-02A

DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIVISION

DID YOU WASH YOUR HANDS?

Washing your hands thoroughly and often can greatly reduce illnesses transferred from person to person. Removing bacteria and viruses from your hands prevents them from getting into food and onto other surfaces where they can eventually lead to illness. It's an easy way to protect your family, your friends, and total strangers. Good personal hygiene, including hand washing, is vital to anyone preparing food. In fact, the law requires food workers to wash their hands.

How Do I Wash My Hands?

It is important to understand that there is a *right way* to wash hands.

First, wet your hands with warm water and apply soap.

Second, rub your hands together for at least 30 seconds to generate friction and bubbles. Scrub all surfaces of the hands and forearms. Do not forget to scrub between fingers, around fingernails and jewelry.

Third, rinse hands and dry with a towel. Paper towels are best as they are only used once and will not re-contaminate clean hands.

How Often Should I Wash My Hands?

This one is easy. Wash your hands anytime they may have gotten contaminated. As a rule of thumb, if you would not want to eat what is on your hands, wash it off! Certain activities such as handling animals, using the restroom, eating, drinking, smoking, and emptying the garbage are known to transfer germs and should be followed with a thorough hand washing. Without exception, you should wash your hands before you make food for yourself or anyone else. Knives, cutting boards, and hands should be cleaned and sanitized after handling raw animal tissue like meats or poultry; and when switching between different food types. Some bacteria and viruses transferred by people are deadly.

Gloves and Hand Sanitizers

Both gloves and the popular hand sanitizer lotions are additional barriers to illness causing germs. **These should not be considered an alternative to washing hands.** A gloved hand should be washed as often as one without. The bacteria still accumulate and grow on the glove and can be passed to food or utensils. **Do not reuse gloves.** If there are cuts or abrasions on hands or fingers, gloves will prevent the bacteria in the wounds from spreading.

Hand sanitizers do kill bacteria. However, the dead bacteria and toxins will not be removed without a soapy hand wash. Sanitizers are designed to supplement regular hand washing to reduce the spread of illness.

Mom always told you to wash your hands. Mom's advice is good. Wash your hands!

*Document available in an alternate format upon request

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Department Web Site – www.rivcoeh.org