

Food hygiene

Hand washing for food businesses

What is the importance of hand washing?

Hand washing is vital in preventing contamination of food by food handlers. Harmful bacteria such as E. coli, Salmonella and Staphylococcus aureus and viruses (e.g. norovirus) present on the hands of food workers are removed by proper hand washing techniques.

When to wash your hands

You need to wash your hands regularly throughout the day and especially at these times:

Before	• Preparing food	• Looking after babies or the elderly
	• Eating	• Starting work
Between	• Handling raw foods (meat, fish, poultry and eggs) and touching any other food or kitchen utensils	
After	• Handling raw foods, particularly meat, fish and poultry	• Coughing or sneezing, especially if you are sick – You must not work with food if suffering from sickness or diarrhea
	• Going to the toilet	• Changing babies and clearing up accidents
	• Touching rubbish/waste bins	

Hand Gels v's Soap and Water

Hand Gels are marketed as a way to 'wash your hands' when soap and water aren't available, and they are especially popular among parents of small children. The manufacturers of these products claim that the sanitizers are up to 99.9 percent effective in killing germs. Research carried out at Purdue University suggests that this is not the case because they were tested on inanimate surfaces rather than human hands. A typical hand gel, which is usually alcohol-based, strips the skin of the outer layer of oil, which normally prevents resident bacteria from coming to the surface.

Hand gels have their use in areas which are generally clean, for example offices or hospitals, but are not effective in killing bugs such as E.coli or Cryptosporidium therefore are not suitable for food businesses unless hands are washed first.

Gloves v's Soap and Water

Proper hand washing is extremely important, whether using gloves or not. If using gloves, hand washing should be carried out before putting gloves on, between glove changes and after gloves are removed. The problem with the use of gloves is that in situations where staff are not given proper training in food safety, gloves are often perceived as a barrier to food contamination. Staff may then proceed to carry out many non-food related tasks (e.g. handling

money, emptying bins, wiping counters) while wearing the same pair of gloves that they then use to prepare food.

When wearing gloves for a prolonged period of time, without frequent changing and hand washing, bacteria on the skin rapidly multiply due to the warm, moist environment created by the gloves. If the gloves tear, or are removed and food is handled without hand washing, a high number of bacteria can be transferred to the food.

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Hand washing procedure

1. Rub plenty of soap into a lather between your palms.
2. Place right palm over the back of the left hand rubbing vigourously in between the fingers and vice versa.
3. Rotational rubbing on the left thumb clasped in the right hand and vice versa.
4. Rubbing backs of fingers on opposing palms with fingers interlocked.
5. Dry hands thoroughly using a clean dry towel, paper towel or air dryer.

