

The Costs of Hand Hygiene

It's a \$9 Billion Dollar problem in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, that's the annual cost for the treatment of food borne illnesses caused by personal control hygiene factors including poor hand washing practices. The Centers for Disease Control link poor hand sanitation to 34% of the documented cases of food borne illness in the US. That's 9.3 million illnesses each and every year in the United States that could be prevented with frequent, effective hand washing.

Hand washing is a key, often overlooked behavior that is important for food safety, disease prevention, and personal health. Yet, many of us underestimate the potential seriousness of illness and its' correlation with hand washing practices. In a study by the Food and Drug Administration, only 2/3rds of those questioned reported they used safe food practices that included hand washing, cross contamination prevention, and thorough cooking of meat and poultry. Most people—including chil-

dren and adults do not wash their hands as often or as well as needed.

When asked "Why" they don't take time to wash when they know it is important, adults and children say similar things:

- It takes too long
- Doesn't make a difference
- My hands are clean
- My hands aren't dirty
- I'm too busy
- There are more important things to do

"Hand washing is the single most important means of preventing the spreading of infection."

Centers for Disease Control—Atlanta, GA

It's a Little Dirty Secret

Several studies have shown that adults fail to wash their hands frequently and effectively. In 2000, the American Society for Microbiology asked 1,021 people, "Do you always wash your hands after using the bathroom?" 95% responded they did. When 7,836 adults were observed in a subsequent follow-up study in public restrooms in five major metropoli-

tan areas, only 68% even placed their hands under running water prior to leaving the restroom.

A 1999 study conducted in 82 cities in North America by Audits International showed at least one critical violation that could lead to food borne illness occurred in 69% of the households. The most frequently observed critical violations were cross contamination(31%), im-

proper cooling of leftovers (29%), and neglected hand washing (29%).

Take time today and make plans to encourage good hand washing in your home.



Children's Health Improved with Hand Washing

Children stay healthy when they wash their hands effectively and frequently. In a study done in a Detroit, MI school, children heard about the importance of hand washing. Half of the students (305) were asked to wash their hands four times each school day at planned times. Children washing at scheduled times had 24% fewer sick days due to

respiratory illness and 51% fewer days lost because of stomach upset than did children in the classroom without the scheduled washing.

Encourage your children to wash their hands frequently during the school day and at home.

For More Information:

Lynn Nakamura-Tengan
808-244-3242
lynnnaka@hawaii.edu



Cooperative Extension Service
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawaii at Manoa