**New Study Reveals That You’re Probably Not Washing Your Hands Correctly**

Washing your hands is one of the simplest ways to protect yourself and those around you from harmful [germs and bacteria](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/bid/338612/Where-Germs-Congregate-in-Your-Office). While you might roll your eyes at the thought of being lectured about washing your hands as an adult, a [new study](https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2018/06/28/study-shows-most-people-are-spreading-dangerous-bacteria-around) by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) revealed that when it comes to hand washing before meals, consumers fail to properly wash their hands 97% of the time.

The observational study followed 383 participants in test kitchens in North Carolina. Researchers monitored the participants through cameras while they cooked dishes including turkey burgers and salads. It was found that most participants didn’t follow all of the necessary steps to properly wash their hands. The most common hand washing mistakes included participants not washing their hands for the necessary 20 seconds, failing to use soap, failing to get their hands wet, or not drying their hands with a clean towel after washing.

Failing to wash your hands properly before preparing and handling food can lead to foodborne illnesses such as salmonella, norovirus, and E. coli. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/fast_facts.html) (CDC), a large percentage of foodborne disease outbreaks are spread by contaminated hands. It’s estimated that 48 million Americans are sickened by foodborne illnesses each year. This results in about 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. As you can see, this subject isn’t something to be taken lightly.

Not only does proper hand washing help prevent the spread of foodborne illness; it can also help reduce the [spread of cold and flu germs](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/how-to-avoid-spreading-germs-at-work) and other serious illnesses. It’s essential to practice proper hand washing techniques not only in the kitchen, but also at work, at home, and in any public setting.

Employers should use this study to remind employees about the importance of proper hand washing techniques and the potential risks of failing to wash your hands. While many of your employees might think that they are properly washing their hands throughout the day, they most likely are not.

According to [Stop Foodborne Illness](http://www.stopfoodborneillness.org/news-from-stop-good_hand_hygiene/), the correct steps to washing your hands are the following:

**Step 1:** Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold).

**Step 2:** Soap up your hands and lather well.

**Step 3:** Rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds (hint: that’s two times through the song “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”). Be sure to wash all surfaces of your hands including:

* Palms and fingers
* Back of hands
* Wrists
* Between fingers and thumbs
* Under/around fingernails

**Step 4:** Rinse thoroughly, rubbing all surfaces to remove all soap.

**Step 5:** Dry your hands rubbing vigorously with paper towel or clean cloth towel. Use this towel to turn off the faucet, if applicable.

Don’t have access to running water? That’s no excuse not to proper cleanse your hands! Always keep hand sanitizer on hand. Choose a hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol – as this is the most effective at killing germs. Employers should also keep hand sanitizer around the office to help cut back on the spread of harmful germs and bacteria.

According to the CDC, researchers in London estimate that if everyone routinely washed their hands it could prevent a million deaths a year. Hand washing is a simple act that only takes 20 seconds, and it can save lives. So why not wash your hands?