

## Handwashing

### What is effective handwashing?

- It is the act of cleansing hands by applying soap and running water, rubbing them together vigorously for at least 10-15 seconds according to the Food Code (But CDC now recommends at least 20 seconds), rinsing with clean water, and thoroughly drying them.
- This process gets rid of dirt and germs.
- Every handwashing stage is important, which reduces and eliminates microorganisms that can cause illness.

### Why is handwashing important?

- Handwashing is the most effective method to reduce the spread of pathogenic microorganisms that are transmitted through food.
- Employee's hands can be contaminated with pathogenic microorganisms and move from hands to food during preparation and service.
- An infected employee with unclean hands can contaminate food. If a consumer eats contaminated food, foodborne illness may result.

### What handwashing steps do employees need to follow?

1. Rinse under clean, warm running water.
2. Apply soap and rub all surfaces of the hands and fingers together vigorously with friction for at least 10-15 seconds according to Food Code (But CDC now recommends at least 20 seconds). Giving particular attention to the area under the fingernails, between the fingers/fingertips, and surfaces of the hands, arms, and surrogate prosthetic devices.
3. Rinse thoroughly with clean, warm running water.
4. Thoroughly dry the hands and exposed portions of arms with single-use paper toweling, a heated-air hand-drying device, or a clean, unused towel from a continuous towel system that supplies the user with a clean towel.
5. Avoid recontamination of hands and arms by using a clean barrier, such as a paper towel, when turning off hand sink faucets or touching the handle of a restroom door.

### When should employees wash their hands?

- Employees should wash hands immediately after engaging in activities that contaminate the hands, for example:
  - Enter a food preparation area.
  - Before putting on clean, single-use gloves for working with food
  - Before food preparation
  - Before handling clean equipment and serving utensils
  - Changing tasks and switching between handling raw foods and working with RTE foods
  - After handling soiled dishes, equipment, or utensils
  - After touching bare human body parts, for example, parts other than clean hands and clean, exposed portions of arms
  - After using the toilet

- After coughing, sneezing, blowing the nose, using tobacco, eating, or drinking
- After caring for or handling service animals or aquatic animals such as molluscan shellfish or crustacean in display tanks

### **How important is the temperature of water used for handwashing?**

- Warm water is generally more comfortable than cold water and encourages handwashing for the recommended duration.
- The water temperature used in handwashing can also affect the solubility or emulsification of some soils.
- Warm water is more effective than cold water in removing fatty soils. An adequate flow of warm water will cause soap to lather and aid in flushing soil quickly from the hands.

### **Can hand antiseptics, gels, or sanitizers be used in place of adequate handwashing in food establishments?**

- No. Hand sanitizers should be used only in addition to proper handwashing.

### **What are some ways a food establishment can promote compliance with handwashing requirements?**

- Train employees on when to wash hands, how to wash hands, and where to wash hands.
- Stress the importance of following proper cleaning procedures, keeping hands and exposed portions of arms, including surrogate prosthetic devices for hands and arms, clean, keeping fingernails trimmed, washing hands only in designated handwashing sinks; and following the appropriate use of hand antiseptics.
- Managers must:
  - Ensure that employees wash their hands, as required.
  - Provide accessible, properly maintained, designated handwashing sinks.
  - Ensure that handwashing sinks have clean, running warm water, soap and paper towels, or other approved means for drying.
  - Post signage that notifies employees of the handwashing requirement.
  - Monitor employees to ensure proper handwashing and good handwashing protocol during the work shift.

### **What are some tips for promoting effective handwashing practices in food establishments?**

- Make employees aware of media coverage on local and national foodborne outbreaks. This awareness reinforces the reporting of symptoms, illness, and good handwashing procedures.
- Create opportunities to remind employees each week about the importance of handwashing.
- Emphasize handwashing at the beginning of a shift, after using the toilet, after handling raw meat, and between changes of gloves. This emphasis will help keep good handwashing at the forefront.
- Use a “buddy” system so that fellow employees can support each other.
- Use training and incentive programs to motivate employees to take ownership and practice good personal handwashing.