

Handwashing in the **Workplace**

CLEAN  **SAFE**
HANDS **HANDS**



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INTRODUCTION

As we all know, keeping our hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid becoming ill and spreading germs to others. Handwashing campaigns have been particularly prevalent throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as COVID-19 can be spread from one person to another by contaminated hands.

Good handwashing can help to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as well as other infections, including norovirus, salmonellosis, and respiratory infections, such as influenza and colds.

This information pack aims to give some key information on the importance of good hand hygiene and signposting to resources which may be useful in the workplace.





THE FACTS ABOUT HAND HYGIENE

- Reduce the number of people who get sick with diarrhoea by about 23-40%
- A large percentage of foodborne disease outbreaks are spread by contaminated hands. Handwashing can reduce the risk of foodborne illness and other infections.
- Handwashing can reduce the risk of respiratory illnesses, like colds, in the general population by 16–21%.
- Handwashing education in the community reduces diarrheal illness in people with weakened immune systems by 58%.¹

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) Hygiene Fast Facts | Hygiene | Healthy Water | CDC [Accessed 15 February 2022]

HANDWASHING AND HAND SANITISERS

Hand hygiene is one of the best ways to prevent employees from getting sick and spreading germs to others in the workplace. Sick employees are less productive even when they come to work, and they can spread their illness to others. Good hand hygiene means regularly washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

WHEN SHOULD YOU WASH HANDS?

Key times when to wash hands include:

- before and after work
- before and after breaks
- before eating or handling food
- after using the bathroom
- before and after handling raw foods like meat and vegetables
- after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing
- before and after treating a cut or wound
- after touching animals, including pets, their food and after cleaning their cages
- if hands are visibly soiled.



Ref: NHS (2019) Available at [How to wash your hands](#)

CDC (2021) Available at [Hand Hygiene at Work](#)

USE OF HAND SANITISERS

In 2021 there was a considerable rise in the prevalence of norovirus (the diarrhoea and sickness bug). Many people are unaware that hand sanitisers are NOT effective against this common sickness bug. Handwashing with soap and water should be the preferred way of cleaning hands.

Hand sanitisers provide a convenient way to keep hands clean which has proven advantageous throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they should not replace the washing of hands with soap and water, which is still the most effective way to keep hands clean.

Furthermore, hand soiling may include chemical contamination of the skin, not just organic soiling and micro-organisms. The level of soiling to the hands of employees may vary considerably depending on the industry in which they work, this is likely to be more among some occupations such as builders, waste operatives and farm workers. Hand sanitisers will not physically remove soiling from the hands and may render antimicrobial products ineffective. Only the process of handwashing with soap and water will reliably remove chemical contamination. Hand sanitisers should therefore only be used when the hands are visibly (i.e. physically) clean.

Ref HSL (2014) Available at [HSL Report](#)

KEY STEPS TO EFFECTIVELY WASH HANDS

Steps 3-8 should take at least 15 seconds

1



Wet hands with water

2



Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces

3



Rub hands palm to palm

4



Right palm over the back of the other hand with interlaces fingers and vice versa

5



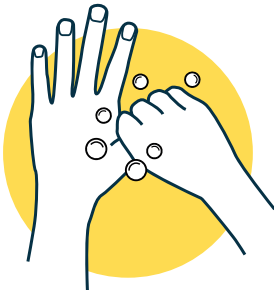
Palm to palm with fingers interlaced

6



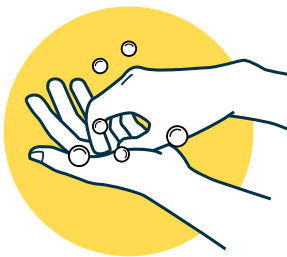
Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked

7



Rotational rubbing or left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa

8



Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa

9



Rinse hands with water

10



Dry hands thoroughly with towel

11



Turn tap off with elbow or towel

12



and your hands are clean

COMMON VIRUSES AND BACTERIA: HOW LONG CAN THEY SURVIVE?

The table below shows some of the more common viruses and bacteria. As well as how long they can survive on different surface types.

Consequently, to minimise the risk of contamination and transmission of some of the more common viruses and other illnesses in the workplace, effective handwashing and cleaning protocols should be in place.²

Type of virus/infection	Surfaces they can survive on	How long the virus/infection can survive there
 Influenza	Hard Surfaces	6 hours - 2 weeks
	Fabric	2 hours - 1 week
 Coronavirus	Hard Surfaces	Up to 4 days
 Cold Viruses (Rhinoviruses)	Hard Surfaces	Up to 1 day
 Norovirus	Hard/Soft Surfaces	2 Weeks
 Campylobacter	Hard Surfaces	Up to 7 hours
 E.Coli	Hard Surfaces	Few hours to many days depending on surface type
 Salmonella	Hard Surfaces	Can be up to weeks depending on strain and environment

² Wißmann, J. et al (2021) Persistence of Pathogens on Inanimate Surfaces: A Narrative Review. *Microorganisms* 9 (2) 343. Available at [microorganisms-09-00343-v2.pdf](https://doi.org/10.3390/micro9020343) [Accessed 17 February 2022]

COMMON FREQUENTLY TOUCHED SURFACES

Doors, bannisters, buttons, and anything that is frequently touched, especially if it's touched by lots of people, may need more regular cleaning than normal. Examples of frequently touched objects include:

- Work surfaces like desks, platforms, and workstations
- Handles on doors, windows, rails, dispensers, and water coolers
- Common areas like toilets, reception areas, changing rooms, corridors, and lifts
- Vehicle handles, steering wheels, seat belts and internal surfaces
- Control panels for machinery, control pads and switches
- Computer keyboards, printers, touch screens, monitors, and phones
- Taps, kettles, water heaters, fridges, microwaves, cupboards and milk dispensers
- Shared equipment like tools, machines, vehicles, pallet trucks and delivery boxes
- Post and goods, coming in or being shipped out
- Shared communal areas
- Bathrooms, toilets and washing facilities

Consider putting in place measures to clean surfaces and objects after each use, for example phones and conferencing facilities in a meeting room. If it's not practical to clean after each use, such as lift buttons that are used continuously throughout the day, make sure they are cleaned often. Wash hands with soap and water throughout the day and use hand sanitiser regularly.³

³ HSE (2022) Cleaning, hygiene and handwashing to reduce coronavirus (Covid19) transmission. Cleaning, hygiene and handwashing to reduce coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission (hse.gov.uk) [Accessed 15 February 2022]



DESKS

Desks are one of the least hygienic places in the office and transfer a lot of germs.

Washing hands reduces the risk of transferring bacteria and maintains a clean and healthy workspace.



KITCHEN AREA

Harmful bacteria and mould in kitchens can lead to cross-contamination to your food via hands or utensils. Kitchens are a key area for the transmission of bacteria and viruses.

Contaminated hands spread foodborne diseases. The simple practice of handwashing reduces this risk significantly. Washing hands breaks the chain of transmission of bacteria and viruses.

It is also important to remember that surfaces and any touchpoints in canteens, such as vending machines or coffee machines should be cleaned frequently to help prevent any onward transmission.



SHARED EQUIPMENT

Although employees may understand that the cleaning of workstations is important, these areas may not be cleaned as often as they should be.

This is even more important if areas are used by a number of people, such as hot desk facilities that will be handled by other people. Remember to clean all items used including telephones, keyboards and mouse.



TOUCHPOINTS: DOORS, HANDRAILS, LIGHT SWITCHES, LIFT BUTTONS, SHARED AREAS

In relation to shared areas and touchpoints, researchers have found that the contamination of just a single doorknob or table top in a workplace environment results in the quick spread of viruses throughout office buildings, hotels, and healthcare facilities. Within 2 to 4 hours, the virus could be detected on 40 to 60 percent of workers and visitors in the facilities and on commonly touched objects.⁴



TOILETS

It is estimated that approximately only 19% of the global population washes their hands with soap after using the bathroom. So, despite the known health benefits of good hand hygiene, it seems that this could still be much improved!⁵

⁴ American Society for Microbiology, 2014 cited in Science Daily, 2014. How quickly viruses can contaminate buildings -- from just a single doorknob [Accessed 17 February 2022]

⁵ Freeman, et al. (2014) Hygiene and health: systematic review of handwashing practices worldwide and update of health effects - PubMed (nih.gov) [Accessed 8 March 2022]

COMMON QUERIES

How often should hands be washed?

Hands should be washed after using the bathroom, before eating, after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose or after touching a surface that is potentially contaminated with a virus or bacteria.

Hands should be washed for a minimum of 20 seconds using soap and water.

How should hands be washed?

Best practice guidance for handwashing - a step by step guide to handwashing can be found at

www.nhs.uk/live-well/best-way-to-wash-your-hands

Does wearing gloves provide more protection?

Disposable gloves can give a false sense of safety. The COVID-19 virus can contaminate disposable gloves in the same way it can get onto workers' hands and contact surfaces. Removal of disposable gloves can lead to contamination of hands. Wearing disposable gloves can give you a false sense of security and may result in staff not washing hands as frequently as required.

Handwashing is a greater protective barrier to infection than wearing disposable gloves. Food businesses need to ensure adequate sanitary facilities are provided and ensure food workers thoroughly and frequently wash their hands. Soap and water are adequate for hand washing. Hand sanitisers can be used as an additional measure but should not replace handwashing.





WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP PROTECT YOUR WORKFORCE?

Tips for maintaining a healthy workplace

- Utilise signs and posters to encourage good handwashing practices and good respiratory hygiene, such as Catch It, Kill It, Bin It and the handwashing posters in this pack.
- Ensure there are lots of opportunities to wash hands - ensure handwashing facilities and hand sanitisers are available, and staff are able to access them. Use risk assessments to identify if further facilities are required.
- Bathrooms, toilets, and washbasins are a significant area for consideration as there are lots of opportunities for transmission but also for breaking the chain of transmission. Ensure that soap and paper towels are available for staff to thoroughly dry hands.
- Pay close attention to cleaning in the wider workplace, particularly areas where people congregate or high-traffic areas and touch points. This helps to break chain of transmission.

Useful links

NHS (2020) How to prevent germs from spreading

Health and Safety Executive (2022) Cleaning, hygiene and handwashing to reduce coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission

UK Health Security Agency (2022) Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) - Guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

