



For safety, wash hands properly, often

After attending a session at a nutrition site over the summer, my 6-year-old daughter told me I was washing my hands wrong and proceeded to show me the “right” way to do it. Is it really necessary to be so elaborate when washing your hands?

It's good to know your daughter strives to be a good student of personal hygiene. While it's not clear from your question exactly how she is telling you to wash your hands, her basic message is on target — most people don't spend enough time or attention when handwashing to do an effective job. If we did it right, public health authorities say, we could make major strides in reducing the number of illnesses caused by infectious disease and food-borne pathogens. In fact, Ohio State University research, reported back in 2001, determined that proper handwashing is the best way to prevent food-borne disease.

The first thing to consider is time. Experts say it takes at least 20 seconds to wash hands properly. That may not sound like it's very long, but time yourself next time — you'll probably be surprised. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends singing the “Happy Birthday” song — twice — while you're washing your hands to reach 20 seconds.

The second thing to consider is surface area. Don't just concentrate

on the palm-side area of your hands — be sure to use soap on the backs of your hands (up to the wrists), between the fingers and under your fingernails.

Using soap is a given, or at least it should be. The best thing about soap is that it makes your hands slippery, which allows dirt and microbes to wash away under the running water. Anti-bacterial soaps aren't necessary, and, in fact, may in the long run be harmful because if used too often, they could allow bacteria to become resistant to the anti-microbial properties in the soap.

Thankfully, a recently released study by the American Society for Microbiology and the American Cleaning Institute suggests that people are washing their hands more often. Researchers observed the behavior of 6,076 adults in public restrooms and reported that 85 percent washed their hands after going to the bathroom — up from 77 percent in 2007. But the question remains on whether people are doing it right.

A basic tutorial illustrating proper handwashing techniques is available online at Ohio State University's new food safety website at <http://food-safety.osu.edu> (click “For Consumers” and “Keep Your Hands Clean.”) Also, the CDC offers guidelines at its “Clean Hands Save Lives” website at <http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands>.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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