

Back to Basics

All of us know the importance of clean hands, but we're not washing enough. Studies show good hand hygiene significantly reduces *your* chances of getting sick and spreading bacteria to others. A University of Arizona study shows that in just 30 minutes "germs" placed on an office telephone, bathroom faucet, and doorknob spread to copy machines, keyboards, hands, faces, telephones, drinking cups, pens, and a water fountain. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists infectious disease as the third biggest killer of Americans.

Many healthcare professionals say the best way to avoid infectious disease is by cleaning your hands.

The Germy-est Surfaces and Places

- | Surfaces | Places |
|--|---------------------------------|
| • Public telephones | • Children's indoor playgrounds |
| • Counter pens | • Gyms |
| • Elevator buttons and escalator handrails | • Doctors' offices |
| • Shopping cart handles | • Restaurants |

Source: University of Arizona (1999)

It's especially important to clean your hands...

- When you are sick, after using your hand to cover up a sneeze or cough, or after blowing your nose;
- After using the bathroom;
- Before and after handling raw foods, especially raw meat, fish, poultry, and eggs;
- Before eating;
- After using an ATM machine or handling money;
- After using a public phone or other public facility; and,
- After riding public transportation (bus or subway).

How should you clean your hands?

- Rub them together vigorously with soap and water for at least 10-15 seconds.
 - Make sure you clean between fingers and under nails.
 - Rinse your hands well with plenty of warm water and dry them completely with a clean towel.
- Or,**
- Use an alcohol-based instant hand sanitizer, and follow the label's directions, especially when soap and water are not available.

While 81 percent of adult Americans agree that washing hands can help keep them from getting sick, an observational study of public restrooms showed only 67 percent actually wash them.

Sources: NCL Hand Washing Survey (2001); the American Society for Microbiology (2000)



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Your Health
clean ^ is in Your Hands



A Consumer Guide to Hand Hygiene



A Day in the Life of Consumer Bob

Germs never take a holiday. Here we follow Consumer Bob in typical, but potentially dangerous settings, where he can help stop the spread of germs with good decisions.

Bob Drops Junior off at School

Playgrounds, classrooms, and cafeterias are places where good hand hygiene is especially important. Junior, like other children, is vulnerable to colds and other common illnesses. Clean hands often mean healthy kids and less school days missed due to illness. A study published by the American Journal of Infection Control in October 2000 found that children using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer in the classroom missed fewer days (up to 20 percent) due to illness.



8:30 a.m.



What Bob should do: Teach his children to clean hands while at school—before lunch, after going to the bathroom, and after recess.

Hospital in Anytown, USA

Bob arrives for his annual check-up. Little does he know how easy it is to pick up infectious and



10 a.m.

dangerous germs from the healthy hospital staff. People who work in hospitals regularly come into contact with unsanitary conditions and should clean hands often to prevent the spread of germs. In fact, the CDC estimates if healthcare professionals properly cleaned their hands, half of the in-hospital infections that 2.4 million patients contract would be eliminated. These infections ultimately cause or contribute to 100,000 deaths.

What Bob should do: Request that his healthcare professionals clean their hands before and after examining patients. He should also clean his own hands before and after visiting the hospital or doctor's office.

Bob's Favorite Restaurant

Bob meets his business associate Ann for lunch. Ann enters the restaurant sneezing and blowing her nose, sick from a cold. They shake hands. Not only does Bob now hold Ann's cold germs, but he could pick up even more through lunch.



Noon

Restaurants activities, such as raw food preparation and the exchange of money, can be some of the worst germ carriers and spreaders. Employees regularly handle things—such as food, drinks, and utensils—that come into contact with your mouth. It's important that restaurant employees take extra care to clean their hands.

What Bob should do: Clean his hands before eating—especially after greeting his sick friend—and after. He should also assess the restaurant's bathroom, which, if dirty, is a good indicator that the kitchen is too.

On the City Bus to Work

After a full morning, Bob takes the city bus to work. Public transportation is one of the germiest places,

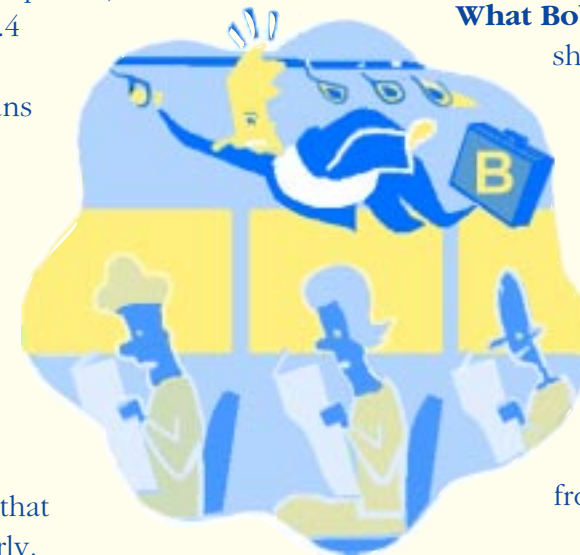


1 p.m.

with 28.4 million Americans riding on an average weekday, according to the Federal Transit Administration. Most of those trips occur without a hand-cleaning facility nearby. Offices are also sources of germs, with shared equipment and supplies that are rarely cleaned properly.

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What Bob should do: Bob should remember that even on the go—when it may not be easy—clean hands are important.



Been a Long Day

Before getting back on the bus to go home for the evening, Bob decides to stop at an ATM. At home, he helps his family prepare Junior's favorite dinner—tacos. Bob and family must be especially careful to cook the ground beef to 160 degrees Fahrenheit and to make sure the vegetables never come into contact with the raw meat. The General Accounting Office estimates that there are up to 81 million cases of foodborne illness each year in the U.S.



6 p.m.



What Bob should do: Bob should clean his hands after a trip to the ATM. In the kitchen, he should clean hands before and after handling raw foods, especially raw meat, fish, poultry, and eggs, in order to best protect himself and his family from foodborne illness.



For more tips about hand hygiene, check out www.nclnet.org.