

# Handwashing

## Introduction

Poor personal hygiene is a major contributing factor to food borne illness. Many bacteria and viruses that cause food borne illnesses can be transferred by people to food. The bacteria and viruses can be carried on a foodservice workers' nose, hair, skin, and under the fingernails. People that handle food can keep harmful bacteria and viruses from contaminating food by proper handwashing.

## Handwashing Procedure

Although washing hands seems easy, there is a proper way to wash hands to ensure clean results and keep food safe. Proper handwashing is a barrier to food contaminants and it is every employee's responsibility.

Follow these simple recommended steps.

1. Wet hands and arms with warm water.
2. Use an antibacterial soap and lather hands and arms.
3. Wash hands and arms thoroughly. A nail brush may be used to clean under the nails and between fingers.
4. Wash for about 20 seconds. (suggestion: sing "Happy Birthday" two times)
5. Rinse thoroughly under warm running water.
6. Dry hands with a disposable towel or a hot air dryer. Do not use cloth towels.

## When Should Handwashing Be Done?

Bacteria and viruses can hitchhike on people, therefore it is important to wash hands frequently and after any possible contamination. Always wash your hands:

- After using the toilet.
- After coughing, sneezing, eating, drinking, smoking, or touching your skin or hair.
- After handling soiled equipment or utensils.
- Immediately before starting any food preparation and after breaks.
- During food preparation as often as necessary to prevent contamination - especially when working with raw foods and changing tasks.
- Before handling clean tableware and utensils.

If you use plastic gloves, the same rules apply.

- Remember: wash hands *prior to* wearing gloves and wash or change gloves after breaks, touching raw foods, changing tasks, etc.

**Proper Handwash  
Facilities**

Maintain proper handwash facilities and set an example to encourage employees to practice good personal hygiene.

Provide an accessible handwash sink with hot and cold running water. Do not use the sink to store kitchen items.

Provide soap and towels, a nail brush, check dispensers on a regular basis, and keep extra supplies on hand.

Post handwash signs to remind employees to wash hands frequently. (Signs are available at El Dorado County, Department of Environmental Management).

Train employees in proper handwash techniques.

Explain why handwashing is important to food safety. Monitor employees to ensure good personal hygiene practices.

**For More Information**

For more information on food protection, contact Environmental Health at (530) 621-5300 in Placerville or (530) 573-3450 in South Lake Tahoe.