

FACT SHEET

Hand Hygiene in General

- The average person has 1,500 germs on each square centimeter of his/her hands.*
- One of the most common ways people catch colds is by rubbing their noses or eyes after touching someone or something that's contaminated with the cold virus (rhinovirus), and nearly 22 million school days are lost annually due to the common cold. *
- A 2007 observational survey of hand washing behavior carried out for the American Society for Microbiology revealed that approximately one in four people did not wash their hands after using public restrooms.
- A national survey of 1250 respondents commissioned by the Food Safety Information Council found that 98 percent of males and 97 percent of females correctly recognized that it was safe to handle food after washing their hands using soap and water and drying thoroughly. However, 42 percent of males and 30 percent females also thought it was safe to handle food after just rinsing their hands under water.

Hand Hygiene in Health Care

- Adherence to hand hygiene (i.e., hand washing or use of alcohol-based hand rubs) has been shown to terminate outbreaks in health care facilities, to reduce transmission of antimicrobial resistant organisms (e.g., methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus) and to reduce overall infection rates. *
- Nearly two million hospitalized patients in the U.S. develop infections each year, and the most common transmitters of health care-associated pathogens are the contaminated hands of health care workers.*

Hand Hygiene in Schools

- More than two-thirds (32 million) of school-aged children (aged 5–17 years) in the U.S. miss school in 12 months due to illness or injury. *
- Teacher illness costs time and money - not to mention the negative effects that teacher absences may have on student learning. One study found that teacher illness-related absences averaged 5.3 days a year, in contrast to an average of 4.5 days a year for students. *
- A case-control study of 6,080 school children showed that those who used classroom-dispensed, instant hand sanitizers at specific times during the day, in addition to normal hand cleaning habits, experienced 20 percent fewer absences due to illness. *

* Statistics reported by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.