

# Handwashing Fact Sheet

One of the most important things you can do to prevent the spread of foodborne illnesses is to wash your hands. In fact, the Food Code requires that all food employees keep their hands and exposed portions of their arms clean. By frequently washing your hands, you wash away germs that you have picked up from other people or from contaminated surfaces, and prevent the spread of diseases.

## When should you wash your hands?

You should wash your hands often. Probably more often than you do now because you can't see germs with the naked eye or smell them, so you do not really know where they are hiding. Food employees should always wash their hands:

- After using the toilet room;
- After touching bare human body parts other than clean hands and clean, exposed portions of arms;
- After caring for or handling support animals or aquatic animals such as fish in aquariums, shellfish or crustacea in display cases;
- After coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or disposable tissue; using tobacco, eating, or drinking;
- After handling soiled equipment or utensils;
- During food preparation, as often as necessary to remove soil and contamination and to prevent cross contamination when changing tasks;
- When switching between working with raw food and working with ready-to-eat food; and
- After engaging in other activities that contaminate the hands, such as clearing tables, handling dirty dishes or taking out the trash.

## What is the correct way to wash your hands?

It is estimated that one out of three people do not regularly wash their hands, even after using the restroom. The following four steps will help you make sure your hands are properly washed:

1. Wet your hands under warm, running water and apply a liquid, powder or bar soap.
2. Rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces. Clean under fingernails and between fingers.
3. Continue scrubbing for 20 seconds or about the length of a little tune, like "Happy Birthday to You." It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove dirt and germs.
4. Rinse thoroughly under running water and dry your hands using an appropriate method, i.e., individual disposable towels; a continuous towel system that supplies the user with clean towels; or a heated-air device.

**For more information about operating a food establishment,  
contact your local health department.**