



Hand Washing Saves Lives!

You probably never thought of hand washing as a matter of life and death, but it can be. When people who cook and serve food don't wash their hands, customers can get food poisoning. When health care workers don't wash their hands, patients can get infections. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that each year, 48 million Americans get sick from eating food contaminated with germs. Three thousand of these people die. In hospitals, more than 700,000 patients get infections every year and about 75,000 die. Proper hand washing could prevent many of these illnesses and deaths.



Keeping Food Safe

Foods contain more than 31 types of germs. These include bacteria, like salmonella, and viruses, like norovirus. People can become infected when they eat at or away from home. Food poisoning can cause problems ranging from stomach cramps, diarrhea, and vomiting to paralysis and even death.

How does food get contaminated? It's gross, but one major way is from feces (poop). Some people don't wash their hands after using the bathroom or changing a baby's diaper. Then they unknowingly spread germs from the poop to food and anything else they touch. It doesn't take much to contaminate food. A paper clip weighs about one gram. One gram of human feces can contain one trillion germs!

Another way to contaminate food is by touching money. It's filthy! Have you ever seen a counter person handle money and then make a sandwich? Or how about a deli worker who handles raw fish and then slices cold cuts? Raw meat and fish contain germs, including invisible amounts of animal poop. In these instances, wearing gloves helps only when they are changed between tasks.

The remedy is simple: Wash your hands after using the bathroom. Also wash before, during, and after handling or preparing food and after touching things that might be contaminated, such as raw meat, a trash can, a dirty tissue, or a kitchen drain.

Preventing Hospital Infections

Patients go to the hospital to get well, but one patient in every 25 actually catches an infection there. Doctors, nurses, and other health care workers should wash their hands before and after caring for patients, even if they wear gloves. Unfortunately, studies show they only do this about 40% of the time. This is true even though hospitals place disinfectant gel dispensers in convenient locations.

What's the bottom line? Hand washing is one of the easiest and best ways to prevent the spread of infections at home, in the hospital, in restaurants—everywhere!

Write the answers.

1. How many Americans get food poisoning every year? _____
2. Bacteria are one kind of germ found in food. What is another kind of germ? _____
3. Name a gross, but common, way food gets contaminated. _____

4. Name three instances when hand washing is necessary. _____

5. Does wearing gloves prevent the spread of germs? Explain. _____

6. What is the easiest way to prevent the spread of germs? _____

“HAND WASHING SAVES LIVES!”

(RI.6.1, RI.7.1, RI.8.1)

ANSWER KEY

1. 48 million
2. viruses
3. spreading germs from human feces (poop)
4. Answers will vary.
5. Answers will vary but should note that gloves only help stop the spread of germs when they are not contaminated.
6. hand washing