

Northerners' hands up to 3 times dirtier than those living in the South

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The further north you go, the more likely you are to have faecal bacteria on your hands, especially if you are a man, according to a preliminary study conducted by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

But women living in the South and Wales have little to feel smug about. In London, they are three times as likely as their men folk to have dirty hands, and in Cardiff, twice as likely. The men of London registered the most impressive score among all those surveyed, with a mere 6% found to have faecal bugs on their hands. Overall more than one on four commuters have bacteria which come from faeces on their hands.

The Dirty Hands Study was conducted in order to provide a snapshot of the nation's hand hygiene habits, as part of the world's first Global Handwashing Day today. Commuters' hands were swabbed at bus stops outside five train stations around the UK (Newcastle, Liverpool, Birmingham, Euston and Cardiff).

The results indicated that commuters in Newcastle were up to three times more likely than those in London to have faecal bacteria on their hands (44% compared to 13%) while those in Birmingham and Cardiff were roughly equal in the hand hygiene stakes (23% and 24% respectively). Commuters in Liverpool also registered a high score for faecal bacteria, with a contamination rate of 34%.

In Newcastle and Liverpool, men were more likely than women to show contamination (53% of men compared to 30% of women in Newcastle,

and 36% of men compared to 31% of women in Liverpool), although in the other three centres, the women's hands were dirtier. Almost twice as many women than men in Cardiff were found to have contamination (29% compared to 15 %) while in Euston, they were more than three times likelier than the men to have faecal bacteria on their hands (the men here registered an impressive 6%, compared to a rate of 21% in the women). In Birmingham, the rate for women was slightly higher than the men (26% compared to 21%).

The bacteria that were found are all from the gut, and do not necessarily always cause disease, although they do indicate that hands have not been washed properly.

Dr Val Curtis, Director of the Hygiene Centre at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, comments: 'We were flabbergasted by the finding that so many people had faecal bugs on their hands. The figures were far higher than we had anticipated, and suggest that there is a real problem with people washing their hands in the UK. If any of these people had been suffering from a diarrhoeal disease, the potential for it to be passed around would be greatly increased by their failure to wash their hands after going to the toilet'.

For more information about Global Handwashing Day, please go to: www.globalhandwashingday.org .

Source: London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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