

Public handwashing takes a hike

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Mom's advice about cleaning your hands may finally be starting to get through. In the latest observational study sponsored by the American Society for Microbiology and the American Cleaning Institute (formerly The Soap and Detergent Association), 85% of adults washed their hands in public restrooms, compared with 77% in 2007.

The 85% total was actually the highest observed since these studies began in 1996. The results were announced at the Interscience Conference on [Antimicrobial Agents](#) and Chemotherapy, an infectious disease meeting sponsored by the American Society for Microbiology.

In a separate telephone survey, 96% of adults say they always wash their hands in public restrooms, a percentage that has remained relatively constant over the years.

On behalf of ASM and ACI, Harris Interactive discreetly observed 6,028 adults in public restrooms in August 2010 to note whether or not people washed their hands. Researchers returned to six locations in four cities where two previous studies were conducted: Atlanta (Turner Field), Chicago (Museum of Science and Industry, Shedd Aquarium), New York City (Grand Central Station, Penn Station), and San Francisco (Ferry Terminal Farmers Market).

Guys Washing Better - But Don't Take Them Out to the Ballgame

Men stepped up to the sink a bit more than they have in the past when it

comes to public [handwashing](#). More than three-quarters of the guys (77%) washed their hands publicly in 2010, compared to 66% in 2007.

The men still strike out more on handwashing in sporting venues, though. Turner Field by far fielded the worst percentage for the guys - barely two-thirds (65%) - though that's still better than just 57% in 2007. Perhaps as a counter to the men's poor handwashing practices, Turner Field brought out the best in women's handwashing among all venues: 98%.

Overall, the rate of women washing their hands in public restrooms improved from 88% in 2007 to 93% in 2010.

"We are really pleased to see these results, which suggest that our campaign is being effective," said ASM spokesperson Dr. Judy Daly, Director of Clinical Microbiology at Children's Primary Medical Center, Salt Lake City. "Although the venues were different, our first observational study in 1996 found only 68% overall washing up in public restrooms, and that declined to an all-time low of 67% when we repeated the study in 2000. We hope that as a result of an increased focus on handwashing in the media over these years, as well as increased public awareness of infectious disease risks, behavior really is changing."

"The message is that people are getting the message," said Nancy Bock, ACI Vice President of Consumer Education. "Between mom's common sense advice and the recent pandemic scare, people now seem to realize the importance of when and how you wash your hands."

First-Place Tie Between Windy City, City by the Bay

The best observed handwashing in 2010 was in Chicago and San Francisco, with 89% of adults lathering up in public restrooms. Atlanta was next (82%), followed by New York City (79%). The venue with the

best overall handwashing regimen was Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry (93%).

More of Us Are Getting Behind Handwashing After Changing Diapers

In a 2010 telephone survey of 1,006 American adults, Harris Interactive's survey for ASM and ACI found the vast majority of us say we always wash our hands after using the bathroom at home (89%).

More Americans now report that they always wash their hands after changing a diaper (82%), an increase from 2007 (73%). Women are better than men at this practice: 88% of the ladies say they always wash their hands after diaper duty, compared to 80% of the guys.

Food for Thought

Those of us who say we always clean our hands before handling or eating food is staying about the same: 77% in 2010, compared to 78% in 2007. Among women, 83% say they clean their hands before touching their food; just 71% of men say they do.

And only 39% of Americans say they always wash their hands after coughing or sneezing.

"Although we are happy about the latest results, there is still work to do," Daly said. "Only a minority indicate they wash their hands after coughing or sneezing. Handwashing in this context is particularly important because we now know that many respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses are transmitted primarily by hand contact when contaminated hands touch the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, or mouth."

"Whether it's cold and flu season or baseball season, handwashing is a no-

brainer," said ACI's Nancy Bock. "Washing with soap and water for 20 seconds or more is a simple way to stay healthy. And if you're out and about, hand sanitizers or hand wipes are good alternatives for keeping your hands clean."

Good Hygiene Online

ASM and ACI offer educational hand hygiene materials you can download online at www.washup.org and www.cleaninginstitute.org/clean_living/hands_publications.aspx.

Methodology

Harris Interactive observed the behavior of 6,028 adults who appeared to be age 18 and older in public restrooms located at major public attractions in the U.S. and recorded whether or not they washed their hands after using the facilities. The research was conducted in four cities and at six different locations:

Atlanta - Turner Field

Chicago - Museum of Science and Industry and Shedd Aquarium

New York City - Penn Station and Grand Central Station

San Francisco - Ferry Terminal Farmers Market

Observers discreetly watched and recorded whether or not adults using public restrooms washed their hands. Observers were instructed to groom themselves (comb their hair, put on make-up, etc.) while observing and to rotate bathrooms every hour or so to avoid counting repeat users more than once. Observers were also instructed to wash

their hands no more than 10% of the time.

The data from the telephone survey are based on a nationally representative sample, stratified by census region and weighted by gender, education and ethnicity composition to represent the U.S. population. The 1,006 telephone interviews were conducted between August 4-8, 2010.

Provided by American Society for Microbiology

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