

# Specialized messages increase likelihood of male hand washing

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The CDC reports that 77% of males wash their hands when leaving the restroom. Recent research, published in the journal *Human Communication Research*, found that this figure increased to 86% among men who were primed with messages in bathrooms.

Maria Lapinski, Michigan State University; Erin Maloney, University of Pennsylvania; Mary Braz, Westchester University; and Hillary Shulman, North Central College published in *Human Communication Research* their findings from a field study of college-aged men. Conducted at Michigan State University, males were surveyed and self-reported washing their hands 75% of the time. This led to a [field experiment](#) where signs were posted in bathrooms that read "4 out of 5 Males Wash Their Hands," with pictures of students wearing MSU hats and a guide to effective [hand washing](#). Researchers in the bathroom then recorded hand-washing behavior and marked how well the guide was followed. When the participants exited the bathroom they were approached by experimenters and willing participants filled out a questionnaire.

The findings suggested that men who are exposed to a relatable message in the bathroom are more likely to wash their hands and ran the water longer than participants not exposed to the messages. This can have huge implications on public health, particularly during [cold and flu season](#).

"It is important from a public health standpoint, because quality hand washing can prevent transmission of many diseases and we have good evidence that people typically don't do it as often or as well as they

should," Lapinski said.

"This investigation not only advances communication theory in meaningful ways," said John Courtright, editor of *Human Communication Research* and professor at the University of Delaware, "But it also increases our knowledge about the important role of communication in health campaigns."

**More information:** Testing the Effects of Social Norms and Behavioral Privacy on Hand Washing: A Field Experiment; *Human Communication Research* [doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2012.01441.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2012.01441.x)

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