

Not even a global pandemic can stop poor hand hygiene

September 10 2021



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

New Curtin research has identified that the average Australian only occasionally washed their hands properly during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite hand hygiene being one of the key recommendations

for protecting against the deadly disease.

The study, published in *Psychology and Health*, surveyed people across the nation to understand the behaviors behind these results, as well as possible ways to encourage Australians to wash their hands more regularly.

Lead researcher Professor Barbara Mullan, from Curtin's School of Population Health, said the study would help to encourage people to practice improved hygienic behavior that would ultimately slow the spread of mild and severe infectious diseases, such as the flu and COVID-19.

"Australians were surveyed when many of the nation's states were in the midst of lockdown restrictions, between May and November last year," Professor Mullan said.

"While COVID-19 highlighted the importance of hand washing, this study showed that people reported only occasionally washing their hands properly, on average.

"This finding was particularly surprising, especially given the public education efforts promoting proper hand [hygiene](#) as one of the key barriers to protecting against the spread of COVID-19."

Professor Mullan said future research should consider designing and implementing an intervention to test the effects of environmental factors, such as stronger visual cues in the form of posters or advertisements where we want people to wash their hands.

"Environmental cues are prompts that trigger the automatic performance of behavior. It might seem obvious but the environmental cue of soap being kept beside the sink may trigger an individual to actually use it,

even when their motivation to do so was low," Professor Mullan said.

"A person may be washing their hands in a public bathroom with no intention of using soap, but when they look at the mirror and see a sign that encourages them to use the soap, they are more likely to use the soap. This acts as a cue to assist the individual in executing the behavior."

Professor Mullan said another tactic to increase hand hygiene would be to use advertising that provokes emotion towards people's close networks.

"People may not care about the effects of poor [hand](#) hygiene on themselves, but stronger messaging around protecting the people close and vulnerable to you such as older or pregnant people, may be more beneficial in motivating a person to wash their own hands," Professor Mullan said.

"Given the benefits of good [hand hygiene](#), interventions to improve adherence should be a top health priority."

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, washing your hands can be done properly following five simple instructions—wet, get [soap](#), scrub (for at least 20 seconds), rinse and dry.

More information: Caitlin Liddelow et al, Understanding the predictors of hand hygiene using aspects of the theory of planned behaviour and temporal self-regulation theory, *Psychology & Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/08870446.2021.1974862](https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2021.1974862)

Provided by Curtin University

Citation: Not even a global pandemic can stop poor hand hygiene (2021, September 10) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-09-global-pandemic-poor-hygiene.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.