



Hand Hygiene in Commercial Kitchens

Proper handwashing is your first line of defense against foodborne illness. In commercial food service, your hands can be the difference between serving safe food and causing a dangerous outbreak that affects hundreds of customers.

The Critical Connection

Why Hand Hygiene Matters

Contaminated hands are responsible for nearly 89% of foodborne illness outbreaks in restaurants. A single unwashed hand can harbor millions of bacteria, viruses, and parasites that cause serious illness.

When you wash your hands properly, you're protecting every customer who walks through your doors.



The 5-Step Handwashing Method

01

Wet hands with warm running water

Use water at a minimum temperature of 85°F. Hot water removes oils and debris more effectively than cold water.

02

Apply soap and build lather

Use enough liquid soap to create a rich lather. Soap breaks down grease and lifts bacteria from skin surfaces.

03

Scrub for at least 10-15 seconds

Focus on fingertips, between fingers, under nails, forearms and wrists. This is where most contamination hides.

04

Rinse thoroughly

Use clean running water to remove all soap and loosened debris. Rinse from wrists to fingertips.

05

Dry completely

Use a single-use paper towel or air dryer. Wet hands transfer bacteria 1,000 times more easily than dry hands.



20 Seconds

The minimum time needed to effectively eliminate harmful bacteria and viruses from your hands. Sing "Happy Birthday" twice, or count slowly to 20.

Preventing Recontamination



Turn off faucets with paper towel

Never touch the faucet handle with clean hands.
Use your paper towel as a barrier.



Open doors with paper towel

Restroom door handles are contamination hotspots. Use your towel to open the door, then dispose of it.

When You MUST Wash Your Hands

Before Food Preparation

Start every shift and return from breaks with clean hands.

After Handling Raw Proteins

Raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs carry dangerous pathogens.

After Restroom Use

Always wash hands after using facilities, even if you wore gloves.

Additional Handwashing Triggers



Personal Activities

After eating, drinking, smoking, or chewing gum during breaks.



Cleaning Tasks

After handling trash, cleaning chemicals, or touching dirty surfaces and equipment.



Personal Contact

After touching your hair, face, body, or handling money and personal items like cell phones.

Cross-Contamination Hotspots

These surfaces in your kitchen are crawling with harmful bacteria. Always wash hands after contact:

- Door handles and light switches
- Equipment controls and handles
- Cutting boards between different foods
- Cash registers and payment terminals
- Cleaning rags and sanitizing buckets



When Handwashing Isn't Required

- ① **Limited exceptions exist:** You don't need to rewash when touching clean, sanitized surfaces or when changing to fresh gloves without contamination.

"When in doubt, wash your hands."

Your judgment and caution protect everyone's health.

Hand Sanitizers: The Truth

✗ Not a Replacement

Hand sanitizers cannot replace proper handwashing. They don't remove dirt, grease, or food particles that harbor bacteria.

Sanitizers are ineffective against certain viruses and parasites that cause foodborne illness.

✓ Extra Protection

Use sanitizers as additional protection **after** proper handwashing on clean, dry hands.

Choose sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol content for maximum effectiveness.

Proper Sanitizer Application

1

Wash First

Complete the full 5-step handwashing process

2

Dry Completely

Hands must be completely dry before sanitizer application

3

Apply Sanitizer

Use enough product to cover all hand surfaces

4

Rub Until Dry

Continue rubbing until hands are completely dry



Common Handwashing Mistakes

Rushing the Process

Many workers rinse for only 5-10 seconds. This removes less than 50% of bacteria.

Skipping Soap

Water alone removes only loose debris. Soap is essential for breaking down oils and bacteria.

Poor Drying Technique

Using cloth towels or air-drying leaves hands damp and prone to recontamination.

The Complete Process



Wash

5-step method, 20+ seconds



Rinse

Clean running water, wrists to fingertips



Dry

Single-use paper towel, completely dry



Barrier Protection

Use towel for faucets and doors



Fresh Gloves

Put on clean gloves if required

Your Responsibility



Protect Everyone

Your clean hands protect your coworkers, your customers, and yourself. Food safety is a team effort that starts with personal hygiene.

Every time you wash your hands properly, you're preventing potential illness and protecting your establishment's reputation.

Clean Hands Save Lives

Make handwashing your automatic response. Your commitment to proper hand hygiene is what separates professional food service from amateur operations.



Remember: When in doubt, wash your hands. It's always the right choice.

