

Just 1 in 3 Brits Wash Their Hands After Each Visit to the Restroom

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With E. coli once again in the headlines, research by global hygiene experts, Initial, shows that only one in three Brits wash their hands after a visit to the toilet. As E. coli bacteria can spread from person to person by what is known as the 'fecal-oral' route, the transference possibilities of bacteria are immense.

The results speak for themselves: 63 percent of women and 73 percent of men in Britain admit that they don't always wash their hands after going to the toilet; only 1 in 3 Britons always do. Put another way, if you shake hands with three people today, it is possible that two of those people didn't wash their hands the last time they went to the loo.

Initial carried out extensive research across Europe, interviewing more than 6,000 people across seven countries, including 2,100 members of the general public in the UK.

Perception among Brits is that they are more hygienic than they actually are:

- British people believe that three-quarters (72 percent) of women always wash their hands after using the bathroom, though actually only 37 percent claim to do so.

- Expectations of men are lower – but Brits still believe that around half (46 percent) of men wash their hands after visiting the gents when the actual figure is just 27 percent.

The poll raises marked behavioral differences across Europe:

- Just 23 percent of women across Benelux wash their hands after the bathroom.

- In contrast, German women are the most hygienic in Europe with 41 percent never failing to wash their hands.

- However, men in France and Benelux admit to being the least hygienic: only 17 percent of French men always lather up after each visit to the bathroom.

Peter Barratt, technical manager for Initial, says, "The fact that only one third of people in the UK always wash their hands after using the toilet is a cause for concern. Fecal microorganisms are ejected from toilets and urinals into the air during flushing and settle on washroom surfaces. The spread of bacteria from not washing hands is a real health threat. It is vital that people wash their hands rigorously, with plenty of soap for at least 20 seconds and, importantly, dry them thoroughly. Studies have shown that by drying hands properly, the numbers of bacteria transferred reduces by 99 percent. We know from past academic research that the easier it is for men and women to wash their hands, the more likely they are to do so. Our latest poll shows Germany to have the best access to soap dispensers in the work place and so it is no coincidence that they are also top of the league when it comes to handwashing."

Initial's new study also shows that:

- One in five (22 percent) workers across the UK don't have access to a soap dispenser in the toilets and kitchens at work – the equivalent of more than 5 million people across the country – in contrast to the 89 percent of German workers who do have access.

- The findings also show that 20 percent of all workers in the UK believe the toilets where they work pose a potential health risk.

- Less than half of the UK workforce (39%) is provided with sanitizing gel, despite widespread concerns and government advertising around the need for cleanliness to stop the spread of disease.

"This is about more than washroom hygiene. Germs can be picked up anywhere; people need to be given proper access to the facilities they require to maintain hygiene standards throughout the workplace – not just in washrooms," Barratt says.

Other findings from the poll reinforce the importance of workplace hygiene on the health of individuals and a company's reputation:

- Over two-thirds of people (73 percent in the UK) would think significantly less of an employer if it failed to show a serious and responsible approach to hygiene.
- At least three-quarters (79 percent in the UK) believe that poor hygiene standards in the workplace demonstrate that an employer does not care about the health of its workers.
- Yet across Europe only half believe colleagues or those in charge take a very serious and responsible approach to hygiene at work (52 percent in the UK believe this of colleagues, 53 percent believe this of those in charge).

"The surprising results of this poll clearly show that there is a great deal more to be done to challenge hygiene behavior to keep employees happy and healthy. Initial supports businesses by providing accessible products and services in all the places people need them to make hygiene easy, obvious and routine," Barratt adds.