Hand Washing

This fact sheet is part of a series about food safety on the farm for fruit and vegetable growers. Developed for the Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association by Annalisa Hultberg and Michele Schermann. Reviewed by Dr. Cindy Tong.

You may not think of it often, but your health and hygiene practices and actions directly affect the safety of produce because you handle the fresh fruits and vegetables that the public consumes.

Hand washing is one of the most important steps you can take to reduce the risk of contaminating your fruits and vegetables with foodborne illness-causing pathogens. Proper hand washing is an often overlooked aspect of worker hygiene. You may think that you and your workers know how and when to wash their hands, but often more training and encouragement is needed. Make hand washing an important part of every day, and lead by example!

**Importance of hand washing**

Thorough hand washing before handling produce and after using the toilet is very important. Many of the diseases that are transmissible through food may be harbored in an employee's intestinal tract and shed in feces. Contaminated hands can then transmit pathogens onto produce.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers should only be used in addition to proper hand washing, not in place of it.

Always wash hands before handling produce. Hand sanitizer may be used after hand washing with soap and water.

Hand washing with soap and water is REQUIRED before harvesting produce; after breaks, eating or smoking; touching the face; coughing or sneezing; using the

For more information on Hand washing

- Wash Your Hands, CDC Features
- How to Build a Hand washing Station for Under $20, UMN, safety.cfans.umn.edu
- Hand washing, Minnesota Food Code Fact Sheet, MDA

safety.cfans.umn.edu
toilet; and any time hands are dirty or have touched dirty objects or surfaces.

**Proper hand washing technique:**

1. Wet hands with water (it does not have to be hot).
2. Apply soap and scrub for 20 seconds. Clean under your fingernails and between your fingers. Make sure to wash your thumbs, wrists, and tops of hands.
3. Rinse your hands, letting water drip down, not up and over your hands.
4. Dry hands with a clean, unused paper towel or a cloth towel. Do not reuse hand towels.
5. Throw towels in properly covered receptacle.

**Hand washing areas on the farm**

Hand washing stations should be near all portable toilet units and in your packing or storage shed. Have a hand washing station near work areas and convenient for everyone handling produce to use. If your farm is large, you might consider mounting a hand washing station on a trailer so it can be moved around your farm as the workers move between areas.

OSHA requires you to have at least one hand washing station for every 20 employees. Even if you only have 2 employees, you should have hand washing stations where they are needed.

**Hand washing stations should be equipped with the following items:**

- A clean enclosed container to hold potable water (water that is suitable for drinking). The container should have a spigot that can be turned on and off, not a push button-type spigot.
- Single-use paper or cloth towels.
- Liquid or bar hand soap (does not have to be antibacterial).
- Covered trash receptacle.
- A greywater container to catch the water used to wash hands.

**Make your own hand washing station**

Place a large, closed, plastic container with a continuous flow valve (available at home improvement stores, camping stores, and some hardware stores) filled with potable water on a shelf, stand, pick-up bed or other surface at a comfortable hand washing height. Use another large container or bucket to catch the wash water. Place hand soap on the stand and single-use towels in a drawer or other covered container next to the stand. Complete instructions can be found at: [http://safety.cfans.umn.edu](http://safety.cfans.umn.edu)

Portable hand washing stations are also available for rent from many companies that rent portable toilets.