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Hand Sanitizers: Not a Replacement for Handwashing in Food Service Settings

Introduction

Handwashing with soap and water is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of bacteria and viruses--the major causes of foodborne illness. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective in killing bacteria and some viruses on *clean* hands. However, sanitizers may not be used instead of handwashing by food service employees.

Why can't hand sanitizers be used instead of handwashing in food service settings?

The hands of foodworkers are often wet; often contaminated with fatty material or with food high in proteins. The presence of water, food, fatty materials, feces and blood on the hands can significantly reduce the effectiveness of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Viruses such as norovirus are also a concern in food service settings. Norovirus is the leading cause of foodborne outbreaks. **Hand sanitizers do not kill norovirus.**

Soap and water washing is the most effective way to remove the types of pathogens that foodworkers have on their hands. In order for hand sanitizers to work properly, hands must first be washed with soap, rinsed with running water and completely dried.

The Minnesota Food Code requires handwashing with soap and water in food service establishments.

When can hand sanitizers be used in a food service setting?

The FDA Food Code and the Minnesota Food Code allow the use of hand sanitizers by foodworkers **after proper hand washing.**

How to use hand sanitizers after soap and water handwashing.

1. **Wash hands** in a designated hand sink. Wet hands with warm water. Apply soap. Lather and scrub for 20 seconds. Rinse. Dry hands with paper towel. Turn off faucet with the towel. (The Minnesota Food Code also requires that fingernails be cleaned with a nailbrush.)
2. Select a hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol.
3. Apply a dime-size amount of sanitizer on the palm of one hand.
4. Rub hands together vigorously for 30 seconds covering all surfaces of both hands. If hands are dry after only 10-15 seconds, not enough sanitizer was used and more must be applied.
5. Wait for the sanitizer to dry completely before touching food contact surfaces.

NOTE: Your employee hygiene policy should include handwashing procedures, plus guidelines for hand sanitizer use, and exclusion of foodworkers who have symptoms of diarrhea and/or vomiting.

Can food establishments provide hand sanitizers for customers?

Food service establishments may provide hand sanitizers for use by the public, in addition to regular soap and water handwashing facilities.

www.health.state.mn/divs/eh/food/fs/index.html

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