

Factors Related to Food Worker Hand Hygiene Practices[†]

LAURA R. GREEN,^{1*} VINCENT RADKE,² RYAN MASON,³ LISA BUSHNELL,⁴ DAVID W. REIMANN,⁵
JAMES C. MACK,⁶ MICHELLE D. MOTSINGER,⁷ TAMMI STIGGER,⁸ AND CAROL A. SELMAN²

¹RTI International, 2951 Flowers Road, Suite 119, Atlanta, Georgia 30341; ²National Center for Environmental Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, MS F-28, 4770 Buford Highway, Atlanta, Georgia 30341; ³Tennessee Department of Health, 425 5th Avenue North, Cordell Hull Building—6th Floor, Nashville, Tennessee 37247; ⁴Connecticut Department of Public Health, Food Protection Program, Division of Environmental Health, MS #51 FDP, 410 Capitol Avenue, P.O. Box 340308, Hartford, Connecticut 06134-0308; ⁵Minnesota Department of Health, 410 Jackson Street, Suite 500, Mankato, Minnesota 56001; ⁶Oregon State Public Health, Office of Environmental Public Health, 800 N.E. Oregon, Suite 608, Portland, Oregon 97232; ⁷Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Consumer Protection Division, 4300 Cherry Creek Drive South, Denver, Colorado 80246; and ⁸RARE Hospitality International, Inc., 8215 Roswell Road, Building 600, Atlanta, Georgia 30350, USA

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ABSTRACT

To identify factors related to food worker hand hygiene practices, we collected (i) observational data on food worker ($n = 321$) hand hygiene practices (hand washing and glove use) and (ii) observational and interview data on factors related to hygiene behavior, such as worker activity, restaurant characteristics, worker food safety training, and the physical and social environment. Results indicated that hand washing and glove use were more likely to occur in conjunction with food preparation than with other activities (e.g., handling dirty equipment) and when workers were not busy. Hand washing was more likely to occur in restaurants whose food workers received food safety training, with more than one hand sink, and with a hand sink in the observed worker's sight. Glove use was more likely to occur in chain restaurants and in restaurants with glove supplies in food preparation areas. Hand washing and glove use were also related to each other—hand washing was less likely to occur with activities in which gloves were worn. These findings indicate that a number of factors are related to hand hygiene practices and support suggestions that food worker hand hygiene improvement requires more than food safety education. Instead, improvement programs must be multidimensional and address factors such as those examined in this study.

Many reported foodborne illness outbreaks originate in food service establishments (25), and sporadic foodborne illnesses have been associated with having eaten outside the home (11, 19). Additionally, food workers' poor personal hygiene is an important contributor to foodborne illness outbreaks (15, 25). For example, Olsen et al. (25) found that annually from 1993 to 1997, poor personal hygiene of food workers was a contributing factor in 27 to 38% of foodborne illness outbreaks, and Guzewich and Ross (15) found that in 89% of outbreaks caused by food contaminated by food workers, pathogens were transferred to food by workers' hands.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Food Code for retail establishments includes guidelines on prevention of food contamination by workers' hands (15, 29). Hand washing is one of the FDA's recommended prevention methods, for it can significantly reduce transmission of pathogens from hands to food and other objects (15, 22, 24). The Food Code indicates that proper hand washing should take at least 20 s and include running warm water, soap, friction between the hands for 10 to 15 s, rinsing, and drying with clean towels or hot air. In addition, the Food Code specifies situations in which hands should be washed, such as before food preparation and after handling raw meat

or poultry. The FDA also recommends that bare-hand contact should be prevented when working with ready-to-eat (RTE; i.e., safe to eat without further cooking) food and minimized when working with non-RTE food, because hand washing may not always be sufficient to prevent the transmission of pathogens from hands to other items, such as food (3, 9, 22). The Food Code suggests that barriers, such as deli tissue, tongs, and disposable gloves, be used for this purpose. Gloves are commonly used as barriers in food service establishments, and anecdotal evidence suggests that glove use for this purpose may be increasing. Proper glove use can decrease the transfer of pathogens from hands to food (22, 23), but some researchers and practitioners have argued that glove use may lead to less safe hand washing practices (10, 15, 21).

Research on the prevalence of hand washing and glove use in food-service establishments indicates that these hand hygiene practices do not occur as often as they should. For example, food workers have reported that they sometimes or often do not wash their hands and/or wear gloves when they should, do not always wash their hands after touching raw meat, and do not always change their gloves after touching raw meat (6, 13). Additionally, observational studies have found low rates of hand hygiene practices. For example, the FDA observed improper hand washing in 73% of restaurants and failure to prevent bare-hand contact with RTE foods in 57% of restaurants (28). Additionally, both Clayton and Griffith (5) and Green et al. (14) found that observed food workers washed their hands in only a third of the instances in which they should have washed them.

* Author for correspondence. Tel: 770-488-4332; Fax: 770-488-7310; E-mail: lrg0@cdc.gov.

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TABLE 1. *Observed activities for which hand washing is recommended*

When hand washing should occur	Activity	Description
Before the activity	Food preparation	Engaging in food preparation, including working with exposed food, clean equipment and utensils, and unwrapped single-use articles
	Putting on gloves for food preparation	Putting on gloves in order to engage in food preparation (see above)
After the activity and before beginning another activity	Preparing raw animal product	Preparing raw animal product (animal products that have not been cooked or processed; uncooked eggs, meat, poultry, and fish)
	Eating, drinking, tobacco use	Eating, drinking, or using tobacco (unless from a closed beverage container handled to prevent hand contamination)
	Coughing, sneezing, tissue use	Coughing, sneezing, or using a handkerchief or disposable tissues
	Handling dirty equipment	Handling dirty equipment, utensils, or cloths
	Touching body	Touching human body parts other than clean hands and clean, unexposed arms

These findings, along with evidence that poor personal hygiene frequently contributes to foodborne-illness outbreaks, indicate that improvement of food workers' hygiene practices is needed. Researchers and practitioners contend that a range of personal, social, and environmental factors influence food worker practices and that these factors need to be addressed to successfully change food workers' behavior (8, 26, 27). Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify factors related to food worker hand hygiene practices.

This article is the second one based on a study we conducted on food worker hand hygiene practices. For this study, we observed food workers for an extended period and recorded specific information on their work activities and the hygiene practices associated with those activities. We also collected data on possible factors related to hygiene behavior through interviews with restaurant managers and observations of restaurant environments. In the first article on this study, we presented descriptive data on food worker hand washing and glove-use practices across different work activities (14). In this article, we present data on the relationships between hand washing and glove use and factors proposed to be related to hygiene behavior. These factors include worker activity (e.g., worker busyness), restaurant characteristics (e.g., ownership: chain versus independent), worker training, physical environment (e.g., number of sinks), and the social environment and management (e.g., management encouragement of hand hygiene). These factors were chosen because existing theories or data suggest that they may affect hygiene behavior (1, 6–8, 12, 13, 16–18, 20, 26).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Restaurants. This study was conducted by environmental health specialists (specialists) affiliated with the Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net), a collaborative project of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the FDA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and 9 states (California, Connecticut, New York, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee; Colorado participated until 2005). EHS-Net is

focused on the investigation of environmental antecedents of foodborne illness, including food preparation and hygiene practices.

The study comprised randomly selected restaurants located in designated geographical areas in six of the 2004 EHS-Net states (Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Minnesota, Oregon, Tennessee; see Green et al. (14) for more information on the sample). While there is variability in these states' adoption of the FDA Food Code, all had similar hand washing guidelines and none prohibited bare-hand food contact at the time of the study.

Data collection. The study was conducted over 3 months in the fall of 2004. Before the start of the study, the study protocol was reviewed and approved by CDC's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the appropriate IRBs in the participating states. Additionally, all specialists participated in training designed to increase data collection consistency. (See Green et al. (14) for more information.)

In each restaurant, a specialist first interviewed the restaurant manager, owner, or other employee to collect data on restaurant characteristics, food preparation training and policies, manager certification, food preparation processes, and hand washing encouragement. The specialist then conducted a 10- to 15-min observation of the kitchen to collect information on the environment, such as the number of hand sinks with warm water, soap, and towels or hot-air drying methods. Then, using an observation method similar to the one designed by Clayton and Griffith (5), the specialist conducted a 45- to 50-min observation of one worker who was preparing food. Workers were chosen on the basis of the specialist's ability to observe them relatively unobtrusively (e.g., without interfering with their work). To limit the influence of the specialist's presence on worker behavior, the specialist observed the worker for 10 to 15 min before beginning the 45- to 50-min data collection period to allow the worker time to adjust to the specialist's presence. Additionally, workers were not made aware of precisely which aspects of their behavior were being recorded during the observations.

During this observation, the specialist recorded data on specific activities that required hand washing (according to the Food Code; see Table 1) and the hand hygiene behaviors associated with those activities. For the activities of food preparation and putting on disposable gloves for food preparation, hand washing should occur before each activity. For the remaining activities (preparing

TABLE 2. *Variables used in logistic regression models of appropriate hand washing and glove use*

Variable	Variable values	Hand washing model	Glove use model
Worker activity			
Activity type	Food preparation; putting on gloves for food preparation; preparing raw animal product; eating, drinking, using tobacco/coughing, sneezing, using tissue; handling dirty equipment; touching the body	✓	✓
Worker busyness	Yes (worker engaged in ≥ 8.6 [median] activities) vs no (worker engaged in < 8.6 activities)	✓	✓
Hands washed appropriately with activity	Yes vs no		✓
Gloves worn during activity	Yes vs no	✓	
Restaurant characteristics			
Restaurant ownership—chain	Yes vs no	✓	✓
Complex food preparation processes	Yes vs no	✓	✓
Worker training			
Hand hygiene taught to workers	Yes vs no	✓	✓
Workers provided with food safety training	Yes vs no	✓	✓
Management certification required	Yes vs no	✓	✓
Physical environment			
Multiple hand sinks	Yes (> 1 sink) vs no	✓	
Hand sink close to worker	Yes (< 10 ft from sink) vs no (≥ 10 ft from sink)	✓	
Hand sink in worker's sight	Yes vs no	✓	
Hand washing supplies at hand sinks	Yes (all hand sinks had warm water, soap, and recommended drying methods) vs no	✓	
Glove supplies in food preparation areas	Yes vs no		✓
Social environment/management			
Worker visibility to manager	Yes (manager could see worker some/most of the observation) vs no	✓	✓
Worker visibility to customers	Yes (worker somewhat/fully visible) vs no	✓	✓
Management encouragement of hand washing	Yes (respondents said hand washing was encouraged) vs no	✓	

raw animal products; eating, drinking, or using tobacco; coughing, sneezing, or using tissues; handling dirty equipment or utensils; and touching human body parts other than clean hands and arms), hand washing should occur after each activity and before beginning another activity. Data were also collected on the activity of preparing raw produce. However, because of inconsistencies in the way specialists identified raw produce, these data were excluded from analysis.

The specialist also collected data on hand hygiene behaviors in which the worker engaged along with each of the observed activities. The specialist recorded whether the worker placed his or her hands under running water, whether the worker used soap, whether and how the worker dried his or her hands (e.g., paper towel, cloth towel, clothes), and whether the worker wore and removed his or her gloves. Data were also recorded on whether hand sanitizer was used, but those data are not discussed here. Finally, the specialist recorded data on the physical environment during the observation, such as proximity of the observed worker to the nearest sink.

Data analysis. We used multivariate logistic regression models to determine the combination of factors that best explained hand hygiene practices. Stepwise regression procedures were used

to guide the determination of the explanatory variables included in the final models. A model was conducted for appropriate hand washing, which entailed (i) removing gloves, if worn; (ii) placing hands under running water; (iii) using soap; and (iv) drying hands with paper towels, cloth towels, or hot air. A model was also conducted for glove use, which entailed wearing gloves during work activities. For these models, the level of analysis was activity; thus, the outcome variables were dichotomous and indicated whether the hygiene practice (hand washing or glove use, depending on the model) occurred with each observed activity for which hand washing is recommended. Because the observed worker in each restaurant engaged in multiple activities during the observation, activity was treated as a repeated measure in all analyses. The state in which data collection took place was included as a control variable in both regression models. Preliminary forward stepwise regression analyses were conducted with the SAS software package (SAS, Cary, N.C.); all other regression analyses were conducted with the SUDAAN software package (RTI International, Research Triangle Park, N.C.) to account for the repeated measures aspect of these data.

Table 2 describes the explanatory variables included in the regression models. These fell into the categories of worker activity

(activity type, worker busyness, hands washed, gloves worn), restaurant characteristics (ownership: chain versus independent, complex food preparation processes [i.e., holding, cooling, reheating or freezing of foods]), worker training (hand hygiene taught to food workers, food safety training provided to food workers, management certification required), physical environment (multiple hand sinks, hand sink closeness to worker, hand sink in worker's sight, hand washing supplies at hand sinks, glove supplies in food preparation areas), and social environment and management (worker visibility to manager, worker visibility to customers, management encouragement of hand washing). All explanatory variables were included in the initial regression model of appropriate hand washing. All explanatory variables, except those expected to only be related to hand washing (multiple hand sinks, hand sink closeness to worker, hand sink in worker's sight, hand washing supplies at hand sinks, and management encouragement of hand washing) were included in the glove-use model. Additionally, whether gloves were worn in conjunction with the activity was included as an explanatory variable in the hand washing model and whether hands were washed appropriately in conjunction with the activity was included as an explanatory variable in the glove-use model. Odds ratios (ratios above 1 indicate that the hygiene behavior was more likely to occur with the activity; ratios below 1 indicate that the hygiene behavior was less likely to occur with the activity) and Wald *F* test probability values (values at 0.05 or lower are considered significant) are provided for each explanatory variable included in the final regression models.

RESULTS

Descriptive analyses. Of the 1,073 establishments we contacted, 808 were eligible to participate (i.e., met our definition of a restaurant, were open for business, and did not belong to a chain with an already participating restaurant). Of these, 333 agreed to participate, yielding a response rate of 41%. Because of missing information, data are reported on only 321 restaurants. Sixty-one percent (196) of the restaurants were independently owned, 38% (121) were chains or franchises, and 1% (4) had missing data concerning ownership.

The median duration of individual worker observations was 48 min (25% quartile = 45; 75% quartile = 48). Observed workers engaged in a total of 2,195 activities falling into one of the defined activity categories. The estimated median number of activities observed per hour per worker was 8.6 (25% quartile = 5; 75% quartile = 12.3). The most frequent activity, accounting for 36% of all activities (786 activities), was handling dirty equipment, followed by food preparation (23%; 514 activities); preparing raw animal product (17%; 384 activities); putting on gloves for food preparation (10%; 224 activities); touching the body (9%; 197 activities); eating, drinking, or using tobacco (3%; 77 activities); and coughing, sneezing, or using tissue (1%; 13 activities). Because of the low frequency of the last two groups of activities, they were combined into one category called "eating/coughing" for the remaining analyses.

Workers washed their hands appropriately (i.e., removed gloves, if worn; placed their hands under running water; used soap; and dried their hands with paper or cloth towels or hot air) in conjunction with 27% (588 of 2,195 activities) of all activities. They wore gloves during 28% (608 of 2,195 activities) of all work activities. More de-

TABLE 3. *Logistic regression model of appropriate hand washing (n = 2,149)*

Hand washing	Odds ratio ^a	Lower 95% CI ^b	Upper 95% CI
Worker activity			
Activity type			
Food preparation (reference)	—	—	—
Putting on gloves for food preparation	0.64	0.34	1.22
Preparing raw animal product	0.44* ^c	0.31	0.61
Eating/coughing	0.48*	0.31	0.74
Handling dirty equipment	0.13*	0.07	0.23
Touching body	0.39**	0.20	0.74
Worker was busy	0.45*	0.30	0.66
Worker wore gloves during the activity	0.41*	0.26	0.67
Worker training			
Workers provided with food safety training	1.81***	1.06	3.12
Physical environment			
Multiple hand sinks	1.63***	1.07	2.47
Hand sink in worker's sight	1.93**	1.15	3.23

^a Odds ratios above 1 indicate that hand washing was more likely to occur with the activity; odds ratios below 1 indicate that hand washing was less likely to occur with the activity.

^b CI, confidence interval.

^c Wald *F* test probability values: * *P* < 0.001, ** *P* < 0.01, *** *P* < 0.05.

tailed descriptive data on these hand hygiene activities can be found in Green et al. (14).

Appropriate hand washing. The final regression model for appropriate hand washing was comprised of the variables that best accounted for the variance in appropriate hand washing ($R^2 = 0.142$). Those included activity type, worker busyness, glove use, food safety training provided to food workers, multiple sinks, and hand sink in worker's sight (Table 3). Appropriate hand washing was more likely to occur with food preparation activities than with all other activities except putting on gloves. Appropriate hand washing was also more likely to occur in restaurants where food workers received food safety training, where there were multiple hand sinks, and where a hand sink was in the observed worker's sight. Appropriate hand washing was less likely to occur when workers were busy and when gloves were worn at the point at which hand washing should occur.

Glove use. The activities of food preparation and putting on gloves for food preparation were combined for these analyses. Specifically, all activities categorized as putting on gloves for food preparation were recategorized as food preparation activities in which gloves were worn. The final regression model for glove use was composed of the variables that best accounted for the variance in glove use ($R^2 = 0.235$). Those included activity type, worker busyness, hand washing, restaurant ownership, and glove supplies in food preparation areas (Table 4). Glove use was more likely

TABLE 4. Logistic regression model of glove use (n = 2,160)

Glove use	Odds ratio ^a	Lower 95% CI ^b	Upper 95% CI
Worker activity			
Activity type			
Food preparation (reference) ^c	—	—	—
Preparing raw animal product	0.69	0.41	1.18
Eating/coughing	0.17** ^d	0.05	0.62
Handling dirty equipment	0.42*	0.27	0.67
Touching body	0.52*	0.30	0.92
Worker was busy	0.51**	0.31	0.83
Worker washed hands along with activity	0.37*	0.23	0.58
Restaurant characteristics			
Restaurant ownership—chain	3.41*	1.91	6.09
Physical environment			
Glove supplies in food preparation areas	5.47*	2.88	10.38

^a Odds ratios above 1 indicate that glove use was more likely to occur with the activity; odds ratios below 1 indicate that glove use was less likely to occur with the activity.

^b CI, confidence interval.

^c The activities of food preparation and putting on gloves for food preparation were combined for this analysis.

^d Wald F test probability values: *P < 0.001, **P < 0.01, ***P < 0.05.

to occur during food preparation activities than during activities involving eating/coughing, handling dirty equipment, and touching the body. Glove use was also more likely to occur in chain restaurants and in restaurants with glove supplies in the food preparation areas. Glove use was less likely to occur when workers were busy and during activities with which workers washed their hands appropriately.

DISCUSSION

Both appropriate hand washing and glove use were related to activity type—workers were more likely to wash their hands appropriately and wear gloves with food preparation than with most other activities. This finding is encouraging, for it suggests that at least some workers understand the need to protect food from hand contamination. Appropriate hand washing and glove use were also related to worker busyness—these hand hygiene behaviors were less likely to occur when workers were busy (i.e., engaged in relatively larger numbers of activities needing hand washing). Because food workers have identified time pressure as a barrier to engaging in safe food preparation practices (6, 12, 20), these results are perhaps not surprising. However, given that time pressure is also inherent to the food service industry, these results are troubling. We have previously suggested that restaurant managers ensure adequate staffing for the workload and emphasize the importance of food safety over speed to combat the effects of time pressure on safe food preparation practices (12). Clayton and Griffith (5) have proposed that restaurants evaluate

their food preparation activities in light of the frequency with which hand washing is needed. A reduction in the number of needed hand washings may lessen time pressure and thereby increase the likelihood that food workers will engage in the remaining needed hand washings and don gloves when appropriate.

Hand washing and glove use were related to each other—appropriate hand washing was less likely to occur with activities in which gloves were worn than with activities in which gloves were not worn. These results suggest that workers who wear gloves do not remove them and wash their hands as they should. Although some researchers and practitioners have contended that glove use can promote poor hand washing practices (10, 15, 21), little data exists on this issue. More research is needed to understand the relationship between glove use and hand washing.

Appropriate hand washing was positively related to two factors associated with restaurants' hand sinks: multiple hand sinks and a hand sink in the worker's sight. These factors contribute to sink accessibility, which likely promotes hand washing. Appropriate hand washing was also more likely to occur in restaurants in which the manager reported that food workers received food safety training. This finding is consistent with other findings of an association between knowledge and training and safe food preparation practices (4).

Glove use was related to restaurant ownership—workers were more likely to wear gloves in chain restaurants than in independent restaurants. This finding suggests that glove use may be determined, at least in part, by restaurant management. Some types of restaurants, such as chains, may be more likely to require and institutionalize glove use. Gloves were also worn more often when glove supplies were accessible in food preparation areas. As with sinks and hand washing, glove accessibility likely promotes glove use.

The findings of this study indicate that a number of factors are related to hand hygiene practices and support those who have suggested that food worker hand hygiene improvement requires more than the provision of food safety education. Instead, improvement programs must be multidimensional and address additional factors (8, 26, 27). These factors may include, but are certainly not limited to, those found to be significant in this study: activity type, worker busyness, number and location of hand sinks, availability of supplies (e.g., gloves, soap, towels), restaurant ownership, and the relationship between prevention methods (i.e., glove use and hand washing).

The FDA recommends that barriers such as gloves be used to prevent hand contact specifically with RTE food. Although we examined glove use during food preparation, we did not distinguish between RTE food and non-RTE food (other than raw meat or poultry). Explanatory variables for glove use with RTE food may differ from those identified in our study. Additionally, because of concerns about data collection complexity, we did not collect data on some hand hygiene behaviors that are considered important by the FDA (29). For example, we did not measure how long workers washed their hands or whether they cre-

ated friction between their hands. The inclusion of such factors may have affected our findings.

There are a number of factors that may impact hand hygiene behavior that we did not examine in this study. For example, we did not measure individual characteristics of the observed food workers, such as age, gender, and food safety knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. Evidence suggests that such individual characteristics influence food safety behavior (2, 13). This study also does not allow us to make causal inferences about the relationships among variables. For example, the relationship between hand washing and the presence of a hand sink in the observed worker's sight was significant and positive. However, we cannot determine if the presence of a sink in sight causes workers to wash their hands more frequently or if there is some other explanation for the relationship (e.g., workers choose to work close to a sink because they plan to wash their hands frequently). Thus, although our data indicate that there are significant relationships between a number of factors and hand hygiene behavior, more research is needed to determine the causal nature of those relationships.

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