

CAPJEM

Comprehensive Study of Personal Hygiene Practices in Public Areas Throughout the United States

Overview

Capjem conducted a 3-month direct observation study of the hygiene practices of 5,023 people with a team led by Capjem's Chief Scientist, Dr. Peter Cicero. The study which took place in various cities across the United States sadly reveals that a majority of Americans do not employ basic personal hygiene practices, most importantly hand washing. It was also determined that even when people do wash their hands, the regimen followed was not effective for proper virus risk mitigation. These findings reveal the role hygiene plays in the current COVID-19 outbreak and its ability to rapidly spread through neglectful or improper hygiene practices.

Personal Hygiene Practice Study Demographics

Study was conducted with direct observation activities of 5,023 people in various airports, restaurants (including fast food), and grocery stores in the contiguous US. The study was conducted during the months of December 2019 – February 2020. These areas, locations, and points of observation were specially chosen to provide a representative, unbiased, random, and cross functional sample of the US population.

Personal Hygiene Practice Study Findings

Of the observed within airports, restaurants, airplanes, and grocery stores:

- Only 2.5% washed hands effectively
 - Average wash was only 10 seconds
- 65% did not wash hands after using a public restroom
 - 80% of men did not wash
 - 45% of women did not wash
 - 95% touched the door with their hands to exit
 - 0% washed hands after blowing their nose
 - 0% washed hands after coughing
 - 5% washed hands prior to eating at restaurants
 - Of that, only 5% washed after touching the menu
 - 35% of Flight attendants did not wash after blowing nose prior to serving food

Additional observations:

- Waitstaff touching food contact area of plate with thumb
- Waitstaff serving drinking vessels by the rim
- Hoagie shop staff processing credit cards, running the cash register, answering the phone and building sandwiches – no hand washing
- Unclean menus and condiment containers at numerous restaurants
- Wait staff on their cell phones immediately prior to delivering food to tables
- Licking fingers to open plastic bags for restaurant food take-away and at grocery stores
- People blowing their nose or coughing into their hands and then touching grocery produce
- Numerous cashiers blowing their noses in the midst of processing customers' products
- Large number of slimy and moldy grocery produce on display
- Customers randomly eating out of bagged grapes from the grocery produce display

Food samples provided without gloves
Customers sifting through food samples with unwashed hands
People coughing and sneezing out in the open without proper cover
Instinctive rubbing of the eyes and nose and touching fingers to the mouth
Countless adults placed airplane snacks directly on backseat trays for children
Airplane snack basket being passed person to person
Flight attendants touching their face while serving food and beverages
Parents picking up pacifiers from the floor and giving them back to the toddlers
Cell phone usage while in the bathroom stall was common

Leading by Example

A father and son went into a restaurant bathroom and both used the urinals. The little boy approached the sink to wash and the father guided him away saying it wasn't necessary.

A mother and child were walking into a grocery store and the child's lollipop fell out of his mouth onto the carpet at the entrance door. His mother told him to just blow it off; which he did and proceeded to place it right back in his mouth.

Conclusion

Germ and infections are ubiquitous across the globe and amazingly enough, humans have built up immunity to many that once upon a time might have caused significant casualties. Although this study does not reveal new behavior or dramatic findings, it is a firm realization of how poor our hygiene practices really are and how carelessness can lead to the rapid spread of diseases and illnesses.

Washing your hands is by far the most important habit everyone should practice. It is the best way to aid in the prevention and the spread of disease and illness – when done properly. Hand sanitizers have grown in popularity over the years as an *alternative* to washing with soap and water. The fact is, you cannot sanitize a surface that has not been properly cleaned.

For the sake of our youth who learn by example, and for our health and longevity as human beings, we all have a responsibility to lead by setting a good example. We all have the power to affect change and make the world a safer place. The time to start is now.