



Food Safety & Nutrition

Staying Healthy at the Fair – Wash your Hands!



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It's about to be fair time! Carnival rides, animals, cotton candy, hamburgers with fried onions and lots of germs!! Except for the germs these are all things people go to the fair to enjoy. The germs that flow around the fair however could be hazardous to ones health. But there is one thing you can do to prevent those germs from hurting your good time – **Wash your hands!**

Think about all the places and things your hands touch at a fair. Various seats and bars on carnival rides, carnival games, your clothing that has brushed up against animals, or fences or barn doors, hands of children that have stumbled down in the dirt, or a visit to the piglets to pet them, are only a few places where your hands can pick up those nasty germs that can make you ill.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, handwashing is the single most important means of preventing the spread of bacteria or germs that can cause illness. They also report that more than one third of the outbreaks of foodborne illnesses are due to poor personal hygiene and handwashing. In a study conducted by the American Society of Microbiology, 6,000 adults were observed in public restrooms in five cities. Only 68 percent of them washed their hands after using the toilet, although 94 percent of them said they always wash their hands after using the restroom.

Besides washing after using the restroom there are many other times that one should be washing their hands. How about after visiting the animals? Animal exhibits, such as riding the ponies or llamas, and petting the rabbits, attract adults and children alike. Animals carry disease and pathogenic bacteria in their intestinal tracts that can make people sick. Even if you cannot see animal waste, it is still possible that a microscopic bacterium is present on the surface of the animal or flying in the air. The bacteria can be transferred from the animal to ones hands and the hand touches the eyes or mouth. – or cotton candy, corndogs and curly fries that end up in the mouth. Once in the mouth, bacteria travel right into the gastro-intestinal tract and cause illness. Some bacteria, such as E.Coli 0157: H7 can lead to serious illness in children. So, washing hands immediately after petting or handling animals is very important. Another good suggestion would be to avoid taking food or drink into animal barns.

Other times that would be a good idea to wash your hands would be after riding carnival rides or playing carnival games. These areas can carry a large number of germs that can easily get onto your hands, clothing and then into your mouth if you don't wash before eating. Think about how many people ride the rides and play the games touching the balls, the handrails and more that have dirty hands that have been sneezed on, coughed on, and fingers licked of sticky cotton candy before touching those handrails or balls.

Water alone does not kill germs. Effective handwashing requires soap and warm running water. Vigorous lathering with soap and water is more effective than antibacterial chemicals. To effectively get your hands clean wet your hands with warm water, apply soap, rub your palms and backs of your hands and in between you fingers for 20 seconds. Then dry your hands using a dry paper towel, not your pants or shirt. Warm water helps activate soap, but cold water will work as long as there is soap and friction – rubbing hands together.

Your next question is what about hand sanitizers? How effective are they? Research shows that hand sanitizers are not as effective on removing all the bacteria, but is better than no hand cleaning, until you can get to warm water and soap to wash more effectively.

Want to learn more about handwashing and how to do it properly? Be sure to visit **GERM CITY** in the WSU Cooperative Extension booth in the Home Arts building at the fair. It will be open at various times during the fair. You will be able to see some pretend germs and see how good you are at washing them off. Come join the fun!

For more information about food safety contact WSU Extension at 360-397-6060.
