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It's time we all raised a hand in the battle against germs

THINK you know how to wash your hands properly? Ah – but what about drying? Not as simple as it sounds, according to scientists.

Fancy, modern hand-dryers might win in the speed stakes, but when it comes to hygiene, you can't beat a paper towel. Microbiologists at the University of Westminster recently declared that paper towels are officially the most hygienic ways to dry hands after washing them.

While jet air dryers caused the greatest spread of microbes, firing up to 59.5 yeast colonies into the air, the humble paper towel fired out just 2.2.

"These findings clearly indicate that single-use towels spread the fewest microbes of all hand-drying methods," leading researcher Keith Redway explains.

Apparently, the average person's hands carry at least 3,000 different

bacteria; a quarter carry a trace of faeces; and, according to Brian Dewsbery of Sterillo (www.sterillo.com), the only hand-dryers proven to kill airborne microbes, "a third of average public washroom exposed surfaces will be contaminated with coli-form bacteria, making it near impossible for anyone to wash and dry their hands without being contaminated".

He adds that the infections that spread include salmonella, E-Coli, MRSA, hepatitis A, and that "one of the most contaminated areas in the washroom are the taps and sink where you 'clean' your hands".

"The only solution to clean hands in public washrooms is to sanitise the entire environment by cleaning all the air and all the surfaces," he says.

Bearing in mind your average public toilet facility is unlikely to do that, here is how to clean (and dry) your hands as best you can...

Follow the 30-second rule

"It is best to wash your hands with hot water for at least thirty seconds

but many washrooms have cold

water and soap isn't always available," says Dewsbery.

Try this: washing your hands with hot water and soap should last for the time it takes to sing a verse of 'Happy Birthday'.

Follow the order

ACCORDING to the Global Hygiene Council, you need to adhere to a strict plan for effective hand-washing.

WET hands first, then apply the soap – not the other way round. Apparently, this help prevent irritation.

Rub

THE rubbing system goes like this: rub palms together until soap is bubbly, then rub each palm over the back of the other hand, and then rub between your fingers on each hand.

Keep on rubbing

THEN it's the backs of fingers

(when they're interlocked), around each of your thumbs, then both palms together again. The government's guidelines also include 'rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa, rotational rubbing backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa'.

Sound a bit complicated? There are pictures on www.hygiene-council.org if you need them...

Rinse and dry

THEN you rinse with water – and then? You dry. With a paper towel. Of course.

Then turn off the tap

DON'T turn off the tap when you're done washing, only when you're done drying, and with-paper-towel-in-hand – after all, a washroom tap boasts 35 per cent contamination.



» So you thought you knew how to wash your hands?