



# Restroom Etiquette:

Well-designed, equipped and maintained restrooms promote hand washing

By Jon Domnisse

It's been a year in April since the dreaded H1N1 influenza began appearing around the world, which was followed by a second, more harmful, wave of the illness in the fall of 2009. Americans — as did those in other countries — braced as the World Health Organization confirmed that H1N1 became a widespread pandemic flu. The most powerful ammunition that Americans had to fight H1N1, according to national health officials, was the same simple advice we've all heard from our mothers: wash your hands.

Despite the clear message that hand hygiene is the best way to prevent infection and illness, which was echoed in the national and local media, as well as in schools, hospitals, workplaces, and other public facilities — not to mention homes — many have admittedly side-stepped that advice.

In the midst of the outbreak, Bradley Corp., a manufacturer of restroom and plumbing fixtures, surveyed a representative cross-section of the American population about their hand-washing habits in public facilities and found

that 54 percent said they “wash their hands no more nor less frequently” in public restrooms since the H1N1 virus emerged. And while 87 percent said they washed their hands with soap and water after using public bathrooms, other responses indicated that some may have exaggerated how often they followed through. For instance, 55 percent also admitted they have on occasion just rinsed their hands before leaving a public restroom.

When asked about kids, 6 percent of parents said they believed their school-age children wash their hands after using the restroom. If so, that leaves 1 in 3 children with contaminated hands.

## Most, least preferred restrooms

When it came to the type of public restrooms they preferred, 45 percent of the Bradley survey respondents chose casual dining restaurants, followed by retail stores (15 percent) and airports (13 percent). Restrooms in movie theaters,

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## H1N1 aftermath: Lesson learned

What has been the fallout of the H1N1 virus? The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that between April 2009 and January 16, 2010:

- between 41 million and 84 million cases of 2009 H1N1 occurred;
- between 183,000 and 378,000 were hospitalized due to H1N1; and
- between 8,330 and 17,160 deaths were caused by the virus.

Clearly, H1N1 made a massive health impact in America and should serve as a reminder of how important it is to be vigilant about washing hands — and encouraging others to engage in proper hand washing to reduce the transmission of pathogens.



*Building a solid restroom design strategy that incorporates sustainable features can reinforce restroom appeal, minimize maintenance and utility costs, and preserve natural resources.*

**Low-Flow Fixtures** — Specifying low-flow fixtures, metered faucets and waterless urinals can reduce water consumption by more than 30 percent. This can be a huge savings in water and sewer bills, as well as energy costs for hot water.

Depending on local codes, water used by lavatories varies from 2.5 gallons per minute to 2.2 gpm, with many public restrooms using just 0.5 gpm.

Infrared sensors on faucets and lavatory systems save additional water by ensuring that water is only running while someone is washing his or her hands. Metered faucets have a flow rate limit of 0.25 (gpc).

**Sensor-Activated Flush Meters** — These can be used to control water at peak times, saving scarce resources and reducing utility charges. Large-scale projects are also finding ways to reuse storm water or “gray water” for toilet flushing.

**Light-activated sensors** — Energy savings and environmental efficiency are maximized with light-activated lavatory systems. Photovoltaic cells integrated into the top of a lavatory system can convert either normal restroom lighting or day lighting into energy that is stored and used to power valves and sensors in the hand-washing fixtures. These fixtures eliminate the need for batteries and electrical hookups. By eliminating replacement batteries, these products not only cut operating costs but also help reduce the 2.5 billion pounds of batteries that are sent to landfills each year.

The design and maintenance of commercial restrooms can be seen as “deal breakers” when it comes to customer perception — and hand hygiene. Using efficient and sustainable restroom design features not only positively affects facility operating and maintenance costs, but builds a more comfortable environment for users that encourages hand washing. ■

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