

Hand Sanitizers

Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet #13

Hand sanitizers are not substitutes for hand-washing.

Hand sanitizers should be used only after proper hand washing has been completed. If sanitizers are used incorrectly they can become another source of food contamination.



Hand sanitizers are considered to be a food additive. The hand sanitizer or its ingredients need to be approved by FDA.

Hand sanitizers are not intended to replace soap in the hand-washing station. They are not effective in removing dirt or other organic materials. However, if used after proper hand washing procedures, they can reduce the number of bacteria and viruses that remain on your hands.

The Wisconsin Food Code does not require the use of hand sanitizers.

How do hand sanitizers work?

Hand sanitizers work by stripping away the outer layer of oil on the skin. This usually prevents bacteria that are present in the body from coming to the surface of the hand. Research shows that hand sanitizers alone do not significantly reduce and in some cases may potentially increase the amount of bacteria on the hand. Hand sanitizers should only be used in conjunction with good hand-washing procedures.

The manufacturers of hand sanitizers test the products on inanimate surfaces therefore they are able to derive the claims of 99.9 % bacteria killed. If the product were fully tested on hands, there would be different results because of the complexity of the human hand. Using inanimate surfaces with controlled variables is the easiest way to obtain consistent results.

