EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE EFFECT OF A WATER FLOW TIMER ON FOODSERVICE FOOD HANDLERS’ HANDWASHING BEHAVIOR

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December 2017
1. INTRODUCTION

**Importance of proper handwashing**

- Poor personal hygiene is one of five risk factors contributing to foodborne illness in foodservice and retail food stores, and thus proper handwashing is critical (FDA, 2010, 2017; Green et al., 2006, 2007).
- However, compliance with proper handwashing is still problematic (e.g., only 24% in full service restaurants; FDA, 2010).

**Passive/indirect intervention strategies for behavioral change**

- Mounting evidence suggests that classical education strategies of knowledge transfer are not sufficient to drive behavioral change (Evans & McCormack, 2008; Schroeder et al., 2016).
- Instead, *active/direct* interventions involving motivational or behavior-based training (Pellegrino, Crandall, O'Bryan, & Seo, 2015; Yu, Neal, Dawson, & Madera, 2017) are gaining interest and found effective in improving hand hygiene practices.
- In comparison, *passive/indirect* interventions with only a subtle change in the environment or system (FDA, 2010; Green et al., 2007; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Viator, Blitstein, Brophy, & Fraser, 2015) may also help behavioral changes with less time/cost commitment and fewer financial obligations for restaurant operations.

**Water flow timer**

- Sufficient duration (≥ 20 sec; ServSafe®) is an important component in proper handwashing to reduce the number of microorganisms on hands (CDC, 2015).
• The presence of a water flow timer may lead food handlers to be more involved in a proper handwashing duration by providing immediate, continuous, real-time, and personalized feedback.

1.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to address whether:

(1) the presence of a water flow timer improves foodservice food handlers’ handwashing behavior;

(2) the presence of a water flow timer in conjunction with an informational poster facilitates the effect; and

(3) the effects are affected by high consumer volume.

2. METHODS

Site Selection and Sample

• A student-operated a la carte restaurant on a large Midwestern university campus was the site of the experiment.

• The intervention hand sink was centrally located within the kitchen and was most frequently used.

• Sample included sophomore and senior hospitality students \((n = 70)\) and non-student employees \((n = 9)\), more than 90% of whom were certified with ServSafe® Food Protection Manager Examination.

Design/Instruments/Data Collection

• A within-group, multiple-intervention experiment was conducted over the course of four weeks from September 12\(^{th}\) to October 6\(^{th}\), 2017.
• Multiple-intervention included:
  - Week 1) baseline phase;
  - Week 2) a single intervention phase using a water flow timer (SaniTimer®);
  - Week 3) multiple intervention phase using the water flow timer and an informational poster (developed based on ServSafe®); and
  - Week 4) withdrawal phase.

• The water flow timer was attached to a faucet and had a digital display face approximately 2" in diameter, which enabled food handlers to observe a thirty second countdown on a display that begins when the water starts flowing and continues until thirty seconds have passed.

• The informational poster highlighted proper five-step handwashing procedures and the minimum duration of scrubbing with soap as well as total five steps.

• Data were collected from Tuesday to Friday, 7:30am to 2:30pm, using a small motion-detecting video camera (AUKEY DR-01 Dash Cam) that included a date and time stamp for recordings.

• The motion-detecting video camera was installed on the top of a sink with the lens directed at the faucet only, thereby capturing handwashing instances without person-identifiable information.

**Behavioral measures**

• Quantitative
  - Frequency of handwashing instances
  - Overall duration of handwashing instances
• **Qualitative**
  - Compliance to proper scrubbing duration (≥ 10 sec or not)
  - Compliance to proper five-step handwashing sequence (wetting, soaping, scrubbing, washing, and drying)
  - Compliance to complete proper handwashing (meeting both proper scrubbing duration and five-step handwashing sequence or not)

3. **RESULTS**

• A total of 839 handwashing instances were observed over 112 hours (see Table 1 for detailed frequencies and descriptive statistics of all measures).

• The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results showed that frequency of handwashing instances did not significantly vary across the weeks ($p = .43$).

• The ANOVA results showed that, despite the highest consumer traffic, duration of handwashing instances significantly increased in week 2 over week 1 (14.9 sec vs. 11.6 sec; $p = .002$) and significantly dropped in week 4 in comparison to week 3 (12.8 sec vs. 15.7 sec; $p = .02$).

• Although not definitive, the logistic regression results suggested that the compliance rates for proper scrubbing duration ($p = .095$) and complete proper handwashing varied across the weeks ($p = .071$; i.e., higher percentages in week 2 and week 3 than in week 1 and week 4), and that the compliance rate for following the proper five-step sequence increased in week 2 over week 1 (49.1% vs. 40.7%; $p = .076$) despite the high consumer volumes in week 2 and week 3.
Point-biserial correlation results showed that increased handwashing duration was positively associated with proper scrubbing duration ($r_{pb} = .51, p < .001$), proper sequence ($r_{pb} = .41, p < .001$), and complete proper handwashing ($r_{pb} = .45, p < .001$).

### Table 1. Handwashing behavioral measures and consumer volume

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Frequency\textsuperscript{ns}</th>
<th>Duration\textsuperscript{***}</th>
<th>Proper scrubbing duration\textsuperscript{†}</th>
<th>Proper sequence\textsuperscript{as.}</th>
<th>Complete proper handwashing\textsuperscript{†}</th>
<th>Consumer volume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes. Week 1. Baseline; Week 2. Timer; Week 3. Timer + Poster; Week 4. Withdrawal. Duration is in seconds. Complete proper handwashing indicates compliance to both proper sequence and scrubbing. In the consumer volume, one day of the week 2 included special banquet for 100 consumers, greater than an average daily volume. Superscripts indicate the significance testing across four weeks. \textsuperscript{***}p < .001, \textsuperscript{†}p < .1, \textsuperscript{ns}p ≥ .1.

### 4. CONCLUSION

- This study provided reliable and quantifiable data about food handlers’ handwashing practices.
- Findings provided useful information about whether passive/indirect intervention strategies in handwashing practices such as the mere presence of a water flow timer are effective in driving behavioral changes of food handlers.
- If coupled with an active/direct training for providing the rationale, the effect of the passive/indirect intervention in its constant reinforcement may become even stronger.
NOTES

1. This report is an executive summary of a manuscript in preparation for journal submission.

2. The authors acknowledge the support provided by SaniTimer®.
References


