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related diseases each year. Of that 79 million, 5000 people die. According to the Centers for Disease Control, poor hygiene, due to generally unwashed or poorly washed hands, contributes significantly to many food-related illness outbreaks. Hands transfer germs from contaminated meat, eggs and poultry to other foods – and from one infected person to the food they are preparing or serving.

While many know that eating foods contaminated with E. coli bacteria can cause serious harm and even death, many don't realize that by simply touching a surface contaminated with certain strains of E. coli can also cause you to fall ill. Poor or inadequate hand hygiene is the leading cause of the spread of germs whether it is at work or at home. Hand hygiene is the most important way to stop the spread of germs and can combat the spread of cold and flu viruses. Washing your hands can also protect you and your co-workers against major illnesses like SARS, the Avian Flu, C difficile and others.

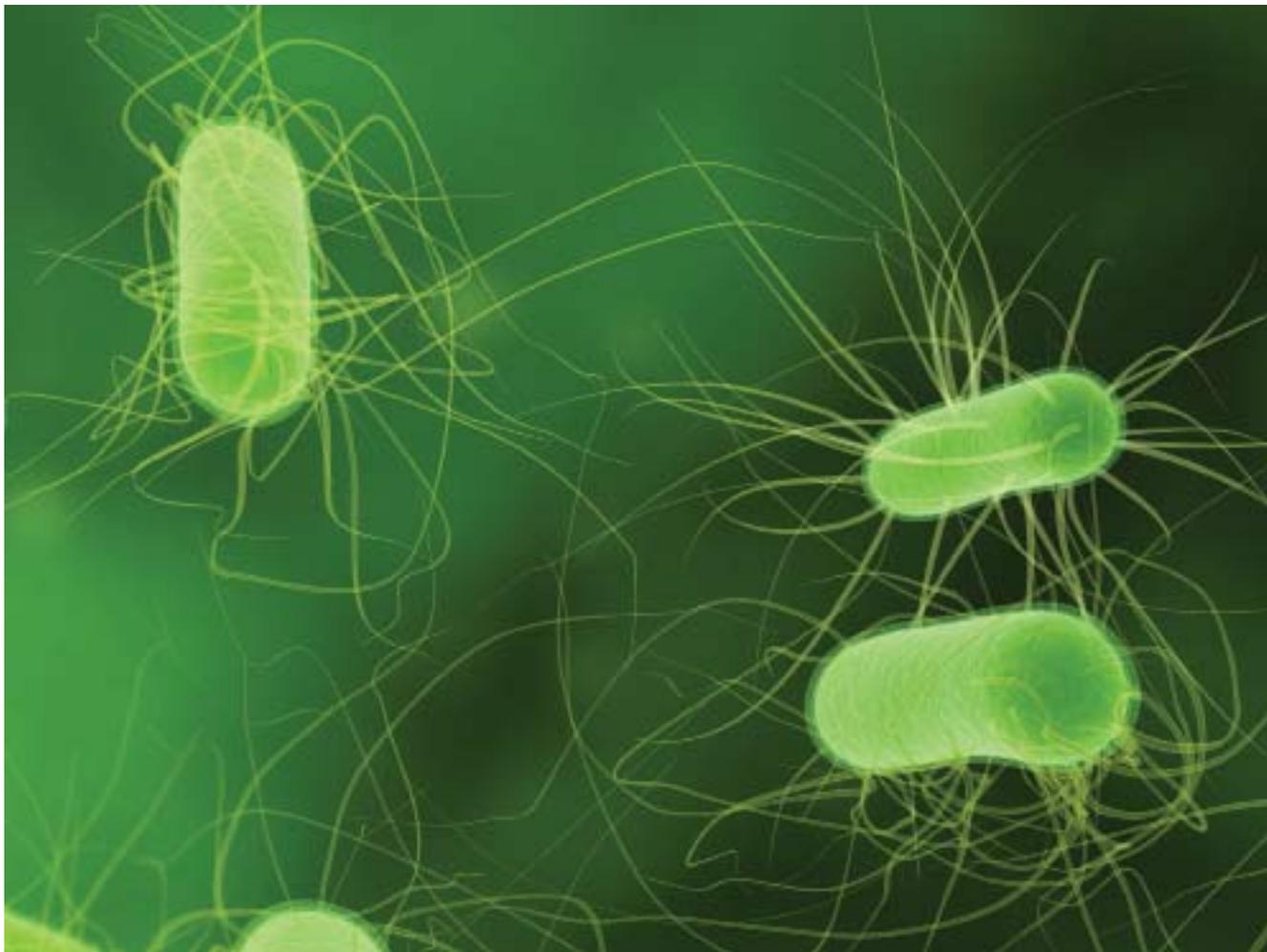
With all of these scary facts and statistics, there has been a major increase in the use of hand sanitizers to help keep germs and illness at bay in the past few years. While a tremendous number of food service and health care facilities have adopted the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, it is quickly becoming apparent that they might be doing more harm than good.

According to the Hand Hygiene Council For The Advancement of Alcohol-Free Sanitizers, alcohol-based hand sanitizer produced by big name companies amount to a \$200 million a year industry and is growing by 20-40% each year. What the companies don't tell you is that there have been 12,000 cases of child poisoning with the alcohol-based cleaners. A string of deaths has been reported from people drinking the colourless gel that contains over 70 percent alcohol. Reports of dry and itchy skin and other problems are very common as are issues with breathing and asthma-related conditions.

So what is a company that relies on excellent hygiene to do? A new wave of alcohol-free products is making inroads. One such product is Soapopular – a foaming, alcohol-free hand sanitizer made in Canada is one viable option for people concerned with reactions from other products.

Steve Orett, President of Soapopular, explains why he developed this product. "After SARS, which was a pandemic between 2002 and 2003, we recognized that there was a need for additional formats for infection control and hand hygiene. The WHO, CDC and Health Canada properly promote the most effective hand hygiene programs as proper hand washing regimens. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers became popular in the late 90s, and we recognized the need for alternative methods to hand hygiene outside of the harmful alcohol-based solutions. We researched many potential formulas and found our current formula, which was granted a DIN in 2005 by Health Canada, to be the safest, most effective alcohol-free germ killer available today," he says.

Used in restaurants, commercial kitchens, retirement homes, hospitals, prisons and in many fast food chains,



Soapopular has met the criteria of the Food Safety Enhancement Program (FSEP), which is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) approach to encourage and support the development, implementation and maintenance of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems in all federally registered establishments.

The product contains the active ingredient Benzalchonium Chloride at a concentration of 0.15%, which is classified as a disinfectant by Health Canada. Benzalchonium Chloride solutions are rapidly acting biocidal agents with a moderately long duration of action. They are active against bacteria, viruses, fungi and protozoa.

Alcohol-based gel sanitizers often evaporate quickly after they are applied, limiting their effect. Soapopular, on the other hand, is persistent so its antiseptic powers keep working after it is applied. It's fragrance-free, hypoallergenic, approved across the board by government agencies and non-flammable.

There are some key guidelines to maintaining good hand hygiene and avoiding being bitten by the flu bug – or worse, contaminating co-workers and the food you serve. You should wash or sanitize your hands often. It is

notably more important to wash your hands before, during and after you prepare food, before you eat, after you use the washroom, after handling animals or animal waste, when your hands are dirty, and more frequently when someone in your home is sick.

Although it may seem mundane, a refresher course in basic hand washing isn't such a bad idea. When you wash your hands, wet them first and add either a liquid soap or use a clean bar. Rub your hands together vigorously for about 15 seconds and be sure to scrub between fingers. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs. Rinse your hands well and dry your hands on a clean towel.

It seems that the advice your mother gave you rings true – remember to wash your hands, not only after you use the washroom, but frequently throughout the day. Be wary of some of the products on the market if you find yourself reacting with irritated skin or breathing problems. Be sure to offer employees options when it comes to hand washing and explore the use of non-alcohol-based sanitizers and old-fashioned soap, water and clean towels. It's time to get back to basics and avoid the high costs of illness and employee absenteeism as the flu bug comes back for another year.

Answers to the September Puzzler

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Your monthly Chuckle

"If toast always lands butter-side down, and cats always land on their feet, what happens if you strap toast on the back of a cat and drop it?"
Steven Wright

