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# When it comes to hygiene, Canadians win handily

## Canada awash in clean hands

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**C**anadians appear to be beating Americans hands down, at least when it comes to basic personal hygiene.

Only six in 10 Americans wash their hands after using the bathroom, even though nine out of 10 say they do, according to a U.S. study presented yesterday at a conference on infectious diseases.

And the fact that they're not keeping their hands clean means they're spreading germs.

The American Society of Microbiology sponsored researchers to watch 7,800 Americans in public restrooms in five cities.

"The dirtiest hands are in New York," the ASM said in a statement. "Only 49 per cent of the 2,283 people observed washed their hands after using a restroom in Grand Central and Penn stations."

Canadians fared much better, at least in an informal study by a reporter and an assistant at Toronto's Union Station during the afternoon rush hour yesterday. About 90 per cent of more than 50 people observed in the public restrooms at the station washed their hands after using the facilities. And many were turned off by those with less-

than-perfect hygiene.

"It's disgusting about people not washing their hands," advertising employee Brad Fridman said as he left the restroom, washed hands still dripping.

"We live in such a personal society, where everybody's shaking hands and touching food, like mints in restaurants. And there are some substances you just don't want to come in contact with."

The potential dangers of bacteria – brought to public attention recently by deaths from contaminated water in Walkerton, Ont. – was an added incentive to pay extra attention to good hygiene, some Canadians said.

"With all the talk about Walkerton and E. coli these days, I tend to take a lot more care," Karim Savji of North York said.

However, Canadians have room to improve. About half the people who washed their hands at Union Station did not use soap. The American researchers said using soap is a key to killing germs that cause colds, influenza and diarrhea.

"A lot of people believe that colds are transmitted magically through the air when people cough or sneeze," Julie Gerberding of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Preven-

tion said at a news conference about the study.

But studies show most of the viruses that cause colds are spread through physical contact. People touch their noses or mouths and then touch someone or something else. Bacteria that cause diarrhea are commonly found in bathrooms.

"Hand washing is cheap, it's easy to do and it works," Dr. Gerberding said. "I think if we were really compulsive about washing our hands we could drastically reduce our risks of colds."

Some Canadians bend over backward to avoid germs in public restrooms, but ignore the basics of soap and water.

"I always use my foot to flush the toilet," bank employee Claudia Seguin said yesterday. She admitted she didn't use soap because it made her hands feel sticky, but added that she planned to use an antibacterial gel later.

Dr. Gerberding said, however, that special antibacterial agents don't add anything. Soap and water more than does the job.

"I don't always use soap," law student Lisa Brooks, who had a cold, admitted at Union Station. "It could be a function of how much time I have."

*With a report from Reuters*

The article EM0008 reprinted above is used in Figure 2.19b of the STAT 332 Course Materials.