Expert Consensus Statement Finds Paper Towels The Most Hygienic Way To Dry Hands

According to leading European microbiologists and hospital hygienists, the cleaning and facilities management sectors should provide paper towels in washrooms to offer staff and clients optimal protection from infection.

The following scientific consensus upholds evidence that hand drying using paper towels, is associated with lower numbers of microbes on the hands and in the washroom environment, than using warm air dryers or high velocity air dryers. The consensus statement provides sound advice for those offering services to offices, manufacturing plants and all workplaces, to provide clients with a washroom environment which upholds the highest standards of hygiene.

The six experts, working in hospitals and universities in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK have signed an eight-point consensus: *Hand drying: an important part of hand hygiene*. It highlights the importance of hand drying, following thorough hand washing, and notes that air drying blows water containing microbes off the hands which can contaminate others in the washroom environment.

Signatories to the consensus examined a wide selection of scientific literature, and also the studies sponsored by the European Tissue Symposium, in particular those undertaken by Eurofins-Inlab in Germany and the University of Westminster in the UK.

Marc Van Ranst, Professor in Virology and Chairman of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Leuven in Belgium, was one of the signatories to the consensus. He said: "From the results we have examined, it appears that there may be a greater risk of exposure to microbes associated with some types of hand dryers.

"There was an increased level of microbial contamination on and beneath air dryers, particularly jet air dryers. These findings have implications for the prevention of the spread of microbes and infections, and could result in reduced illness and time off for sickness, and so ultimately provide economic benefit too. We urge that they be explored further by companies, cleaning and facilities' managers and beyond."

Hand hygiene is recognised as the most important standard measure to prevent cross contamination or the transmission of nosocomial hospital acquired infections. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends the use of paper towels in its poster on hand washing; the consensus statement will hopefully prompt further research and steer policy guidance in all workplace washrooms – particularly those where workers are involved in the preparation of food.

"Paper tissue absorbs water and microorganisms," said Roberto Berardi, Chairman of the European Tissue Symposium. "It is crucial that washrooms offer a method of hand drying that minimises the risk of re-contaminating the hands and blowing microbes onto yourself, others or surfaces around you. This scientific consensus is an important step in supporting our efforts to promote paper towels as the most hygienic hand-drying solution."

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Hand drying: an important part of hand hygiene.

Hand drying: an important part of hand hygiene: Conclusions

- Some microbes remain on the hands after washing, and these are more easily spread around if hands are not dried adequately.
- Generally, the available hand drying methods in public washrooms are based on either water absorption (single-use paper and textile towels) or water dispersal by several ways (warm air dryers, high velocity air dryers, and so on).
- Warm air dryers are less efficient than other methods at drying the hands, and damp hands are more likely to transfer microbes.
- High velocity air dryers are particularly likely to spread microbes, given that they blow water which contains microbes off the hands.

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