It's flu season! Remind employees that a flu shot is the best protection! Click here to sign up for the weekly flu report.

Implementing nudges to increase handwashing

Handwashing is a critical part of ensuring food safety and preventing cross contamination in a food establishment. For handwashing to be effective, it needs to be practiced consistently and thoroughly. Even when employees have access to soap and water, and know how to properly wash their hands, many food service workers still do not properly wash their hands consistently and at the correct times.

Changing the behavior of your employees is a huge challenge. One tool that can help change your employees’ handwashing behavior is the use of nudges.

What are nudges?
Nudges are simple cues in our environment that influence us to behave in a certain way. The idea of nudges is based on the theory that behavior is not only based on conscious thoughts and decisions, but that it can also be unconscious guided by aspects of our environment.

Nudges have been used in marketing and urban planning to change human behavior, and have been tested to encourage healthy behaviors, including handwashing. Handwashing is often done as a relatively unconscious action, so it lends itself well to nudging.

How can you use nudges in your food and beverage establishment?
Successful examples of nudges are simple and easily noticed. Some of them are already built into Food Code requirements and are items that are checked on routine inspections. They may include:
- Hot and cold running water at handwashing sinks
- Available soap
- Available paper towels
- A handwashing sink that is easily accessible as employees move throughout the kitchen, especially at critical times (for example, the sink is available when employees enter the kitchen, or are handling raw animal foods)
- A handwashing sink that is not blocked by dirty dishes, food or other kitchen equipment
- Noticeable signage in bold font that stands out from the background, stating that the sink is for handwashing
- Signage that has a message stating the positive impact of handwashing or has a “ucky” factor explaining what could happen when employees don’t wash hands.

Interestingly, in one study of handwashing, individuals showed a preference for using sinks with mirrors!

Finally, nudges can take the form of brief weekly safety trainings, reminding employees regularly of how, when and where to wash hands, the importance of not working while they are sick, and of recent outbreaks that have occurred.

Global Handwashing Day
October 15th
Help celebrate by holding a handwashing training!