

Covid-19 pandemic has changed hand hygiene practices across Europe

People more aware of importance of regular hand washing and concerned about health risks associated with drying hands in public washrooms

Brussels, Belgium, 19 September 2022 – A survey has found that Europeans are more aware of the importance of proper hand washing and drying since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. They are washing their hands more frequently and demanding paper towels for hand drying due to their excellent hygiene properties.

The survey, carried out across 10 countries in Europe¹, and sponsored by ETS, probes people's attitudes towards hand hygiene post pandemic and explores how habits and preferences had changed.

A whopping 86% of people report having washed their hands more often since the start of the pandemic - and in Spain and Italy the figure is over 90%. More than half of respondents also report that the pandemic had altered their preferred method of hand drying in public washrooms. This is particularly the case in Sweden and more generally among people in middle age – 35-50.

For the majority of people, the pandemic has increased the frequency with which they dry their hands with paper towels. In most countries, men have changed their habits more than women – notably in the Netherlands.

Covid has also served to heighten awareness about the potential health risks associated with using electric hand dryers due to the potential for bacteria to be blown into the air. Almost 60% of people confirm that they are concerned about this. Men are more concerned than women and younger people are significantly more concerned than older ones, with 70% of 18-34 year olds aware of possible risks or having read about them. The Spanish are the most concerned and the Italians and British the least.

The majority of respondents across all age groups believe that paper towels are the most hygienic method of hand drying and prefer them to any other method. But there is quite some difference in people's responses when they find that their preferred hand drying method is not available: Belgians, Germans and Poles shake their hands instead, while the Spanish dry their hands with toilet tissue. Almost half of people will take action if their preferred hand drying method is not available – particularly in Finland (64%) and Poland (62%).

The survey confirms that the hand hygiene lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic have had a lasting impact on the habits of Europeans. They are more aware, more concerned and more vocal about having access to their preferred hand drying method: paper towels.

More information about the survey, can be found [here](#).

Ends

¹ Belgium, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and UK



Findings at a glance

- Since the Covid pandemic, over 88% of men and 85% of women washed their hands more often during the day
- 52% of people said that Covid had changed their preferred method of hand drying in public washrooms
- 59.55% of people said that the Covid pandemic had raised their concerns about the potential health risks of using electric hand dryers in public washrooms due to the possible increase in bacteria that are blown into the air
- 55.6% of men are aware of the possible risks of using electric hand dryers
- 40.4% of women have read about the health risks
- 53.7% of people consider paper towels the most hygienic method of drying hands
- 57.21% of people said that their overall perception of an establishment would be affected if it did not provide their preferred method of hand drying
- 49.75% of people would take action if a washroom does not provide your preferred method for hand drying

About ETS

ETS is the European Tissue Paper Industry Association. The members of ETS represent the majority of tissue paper producers throughout Europe and around 90% of the total European tissue production. ETS was founded in 1971 and is based in Brussels. For more information: www.europeantissue.com

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