

Consumer Handwashing Tracker

Results available: Results available

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

Research topics: [Food hygiene](#)

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Executive Summary

Between April 2020 and January 2022, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned a quarterly survey on consumer handwashing. Key findings from this survey are:

Across all waves of the handwashing tracker, participants were most likely to report washing their hands with soap and warm water. However, the proportion who reported handwashing with soap and warm water 'always' or 'most of the time' declined over time (79% April 2020, compared to 68% in January 2022).

Most participants reported washing their hands for between 20 and 24 seconds across all waves. However, the proportion who reported this significantly declined over time (was 35% in April 2020, down to 27% in January 2022).

Over time, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of participants who reported 'always' washing their hands in the following scenarios inside the home:

- before cooking/preparing food (72% in April 2020, 62% in January 2022)
- before eating (48% in April 2020, 42% in January 2022)
- after handling rubbish (73% in April 2020, 65% in January 2022)
- when arriving home, after a trip outside of the home (55% in April 2020, 47% in January 2022)

Reported handwashing after contact with animals (including pets) remained broadly stable over time. On average, across all waves, 36% of participants with a pet reported washing their hands 'always' after contact with animals, (whilst 26% reported doing this 'most of the time', 30% reported doing this 'sometimes' and 7% reported 'never' washing their hands after contact with animals).

Over time, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of participants who reported 'always' washing their hands in the following scenarios outside of the home:

- when eating a picnic (35% in July 2020, 29% in January 2022)
- when consuming a takeaway outside of the home (35% in July 2020, 30% in January 2022)

Since a peak in October 2020 (43%), the proportion of participants who reported 'always' washing their hands after blowing their nose, sneezing or coughing into their hands gradually declined and was significantly lower in January 2022 (35%).

The proportion of participants who reported 'always' washing their hands after using the toilet also declined over time. In April 2020 87% of participants reported 'always' washing their hands after using the toilet, decreasing significantly to 80% in January 2022.

Across all waves, most participants reported carrying and using hand sanitising gel as a hand washing alternative in a range of scenarios, but the proportion who reported doing this declined over time. For example:

- 55% of participants reported using hand sanitising gel after using public transport in October 2020, declining significantly to 44% in January 2022
- 54% of participants reported using hand sanitising gel when attending a social event in October 2020, declining significantly to 45% January 2022.