

Yale *Environmental Health & Safety*

Avoid Touching Your Face

In a landmark study by researchers at the University of Utah, the authors who were observing clinical lab researchers work with biohazards known to be transmitted via the eyes, nose, or mouth, identified the following information.

- 72% of all researchers observed touched their face at least once during the study. Those touching their eyes, nose or mouth were most concerning.
- On average, they observed 2.6 hand to face contacts (HFCs) per hour.
- Only 3 of the 93 researchers observed had any eye or face protection (safety glasses, goggles, or face shield). Most did not wear anything on their face.

Notably, from their observations, they noted that from the procedures conducted, there was a very high likelihood that the researchers' fingers, hands, and wrists were likely contaminated with the pathogens that they were handling.

They also stressed that HFC is a likely contributor to the 80% of laboratory acquired infections that have been documented but those infected could not identify a specific route of exposure.

Adding credence to this study is that the fact that researchers will report exposures that they can "feel", such as needlesticks, other lacerations, or splashes of biohazards to the facial mucous membranes. But they won't report what they can't feel, exposure to biohazardous aerosols, accidental ingestion, or forgetting that they touched their face, or had very minor breaks in their skin under leaking gloves.

More information regarding this study can be found in their reference on this topic below.

Johnston, J.D., et al, "The Influence of Risk Perception on Biosafety Level-2 Laboratory Workers' Hand-To-Face Contact Behaviors," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene*, Vol. 11, pp 625-632, September 2014