

What evidence is there for the health impact of handwashing with soap?

a) Diarrhoea

Handwashing with soap and water reduces the risk of diarrhoea by 37% (95% CI 25-49%) in children under 5 years of age. This reduction is similar in both high and low income countries. The effect is consistent across different settings and populations. Handwashing with soap and water is a simple and effective intervention to reduce the burden of diarrhoeal disease.

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Table 1. Summary of the findings of reviews on the impact of handwashing on the risk of diarrhoea			
Author		# studies	Reduction in diarrhoea risk
Handwashing with soap and water	Children under 5 years of age	1	37% (95% CI 25-49%)
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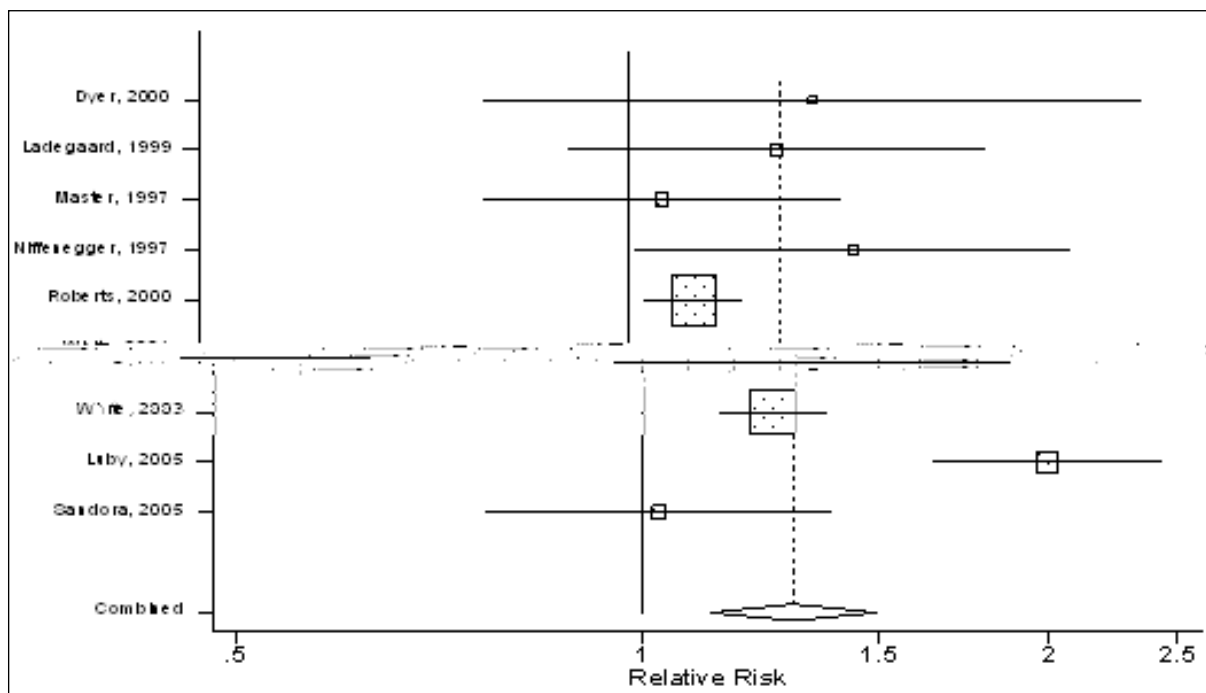


Figure 1. Forest plot showing Relative Risk (RR) for various studies. The x-axis represents Relative Risk, ranging from 0.5 to 2.5. The y-axis lists the studies. Each study is represented by a square (point estimate) and a horizontal line (confidence interval). A vertical dashed line is drawn at RR = 1.25. The 'Combined' study is represented by a diamond centered at RR = 1.25.

d) Eye infection

Hand hygiene is important for the prevention of eye infections. The most common eye infections are conjunctivitis and bacterial keratitis. Hand hygiene can reduce the risk of these infections by preventing the spread of bacteria and viruses from the hands to the eyes.

Limitations of the evidence

The evidence for the effectiveness of hand hygiene in preventing eye infections is limited. Most studies are observational and do not include a control group. In addition, the studies often do not measure the actual number of bacteria or viruses on the hands before and after hand hygiene.

— The following are the limitations of the evidence:

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What are the benefits of the use of soap?

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