

## Let's talk about the importance of hygiene



A.I.S.E. is the umbrella organisation representing the European detergents and maintenance products industry. Aisling O'Kane talks about the importance of hygiene with Thomas Rauch, director of IHO (the German industry association for hygiene and surface disinfection) and chair of A.I.S.E.'s Professional Cleaning & Hygiene Steering Group.

### What is hygiene and why is it important for our health?

Hygiene is a complex topic, but one which is more familiar in everyday conversation today, than pre-pandemic. To professionals who are involved in the cleaning industry, such as the companies and associations in the A.I.S.E. network, we know that hygiene is fundamental to maintaining public health. In our modern society, the speed at which illnesses spread is alarming. There is also increasing resistance to antibiotics and a squeeze on resources in companies, meaning cleaning can be compromised. These are a few of the reasons why the need for hygiene has to be reinforced and talked about.

Hygiene is the practices or conditions that break the chain of infection – in practical terms, this means preventing the spread of an illness, by cleaning and disinfecting surfaces for example, washing our hands, or wearing a mask. During the pandemic, these practices became commonplace to everyone. To adequately address the infectious disease issues we face in the 21st century, it's

important not to forget how essential hygiene practices every day are. Hygiene and breaking the chain of infection depends on each of us! It is thanks to hygienic practices such as disinfecting our hands, that we have been able to move out of lockdown, to travel again, see our families and socialise. Hygiene is the most significant corner stone of public health.

### How does the detergents industry ensure hygiene?

The detergents industry enables many other industries to work, by supplying products for diverse applications. As an example, let's talk about the food we eat: take-away



sandwiches, home cooked dinners or our children's lunch in the school canteen. This industry supplies every step of the food chain with appropriate products, processes and training, from the milking of the cow to the churning of the cheese.

Food processing industries must meet strict hygiene regulations to ensure the safety of the food chain, and ultimately the consumer. Contamination from harmful viruses or bacteria is avoided through the appropriate application of cleaning agents and disinfectants that are subject to rigorous European standards, protocols and food safety management systems.

Milk quality in this example is influenced by hygiene before, during and after the milking process. The importance of good barn hygiene and control is essential for a well-functioning and safe dairy farm. Hygiene requires cleaning and where needed, disinfection.

### What role do disinfectants have?

Disinfectants are products that contain active biocidal substances with antimicrobial properties. Disinfectants are essential in our everyday lives to protect our health by preventing the spread of harmful microbes. These products are highly regulated by the EU Biocidal

to European Norms (EN) are required to ensure eg, a 99.999 per cent efficacy. This claim is not a marketing campaign, but a confirmation that the product complies with strict standards and efficacy testing and meets the requirements of customers and EU legislation.

The professional user intending to apply a disinfectant will need guidance on the most appropriate product for each application, as this is different for food hygiene, industrial laundry or the healthcare sector for example. European legislation and standards ensure safe and efficacious disinfectant use. National associations such as the IHO provide guidance on the selection of disinfectants – the IHO Disinfectant List ([www.desinfektionsmittelliste.de](http://www.desinfektionsmittelliste.de)) proved to be an important and reliable tool during the pandemic.

### What lessons have we learnt from the pandemic?

It's clear that cleaning and disinfection products and hygiene processes are key to maintaining our modern way of life, and that ensuring hygiene is no easy task. The importance of regular hand disinfection was already known before the pandemic, but we are seeing a very high acceptance of broader hygiene measures. In addition, education and expertise in the field of hygiene and the use of professional cleaning agents are in demand and there is greater recognition for the knowledge and expertise of our industry. I would say that this industry is a public health partner, and indeed we were considered one of the essential industries by the EU Commission during the pandemic. The most important lesson we must take from the pandemic is not to underestimate the need for hygiene, for our health and our wellbeing.

Qu'est-ce l'hygiène et pourquoi importe-t-elle pour notre santé ? Aisling O'Kane, de l'A.I.S.E., l'organisation faîtière de l'industrie des détergents, s'entretient avec Thomas Rauch, de l'association industrielle allemande IHO, sur le rôle du secteur en tant que partenaire en matière de santé publique.

Was ist Hygiene, und warum ist sie wichtig für unsere Gesundheit? Aisling O'Kane vom Dachverband der Waschmittelindustrie A.I.S.E. führt ein Gespräch mit Thomas Rauch vom deutschen Industrieverband IHO über die Rolle der Branche als Partner der öffentlichen Gesundheit.

Cos'è l'igiene e perchè è importante per la nostra salute? Aisling O'Kane dell'organizzazione ombrello del settore dei detersivi A.I.S.E. a colloquio con Thomas Rauch dell'associazione tedesca di settore IHO parla del ruolo del settore come un partner della sanità pubblica.