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Establishing the International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene (IFH) in the USA

Elizabeth Scott PhD, Vice Chair of the International Forum on Home Hygiene & Joseph Rubino, Consultant in Home & Community Hygiene, USA

The IFH was established in 1997 in the UK and since then has been recognized as a leading scientific authority on home and community hygiene. Although we take a global view of the importance of effective and sustainable hygiene practice in home and everyday life settings, our base has always remained in the UK and as such, has strong ties to British and European-based researchers and consumers.

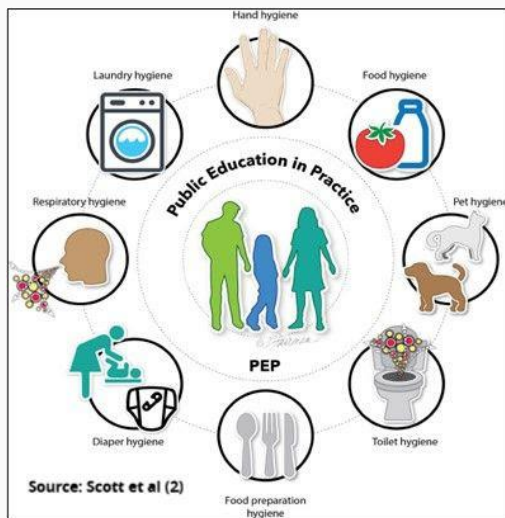
A long term goal has been to bring the IFH to the United States and with the recent approval of the IFH Board, we have started initial work on developing an IFH presence in the US and establishing IFH-USA. We know that there is already strong interest in our work because around 50% of visitors to our website are from USA.

But while the role of hygiene in mitigating infectious agents and thereby preventing disease and promoting health is universal, the US population comprises a diversity of cultures, races, languages and socioeconomic groups with habits, attitudes and practices unique to the US that require customized strategies and messaging. It is also important to note that some 43 million people in the USA live in poverty (<https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/monthly-poverty-february-2022>) and according to the US Water Alliance, there are more than 2 million Americans living without basic access to safe drinking water and sanitation in low resourced communities. In addition, no one agency or professional organization in the US currently champions and supports public hygiene information and education or promotes effective hygiene practices for everyday living. IFH-USA will take these factors into account as we develop and promote targeted approaches for combating the routine threat of community-based infectious agents and also emerging or re-emerging community-based infections that are appropriate for these differing communities.

IFH-USA will address home and everyday life hygiene from the viewpoint of the American home and, more importantly, the American family or household and their lifestyle, focusing specifically on the actions family members can take in their everyday lives to protect themselves from infectious disease, including:

- the role of hygiene to minimize antimicrobial resistance
- hygiene practices to protect immunocompromised family members in their everyday lives
- food hygiene at food safety home and on the go, especially around the holidays and summer outdoor cooking
- handwashing and hand hygiene practices at home and away from home
- contact surface hygiene
- respiratory hygiene in home, daycare, school and work etc.
- indoor air hygiene
- laundering clothing and household linens specific for US wash temperatures, water volumes and washing machines
- healthcare delivered at home
- hygiene practices to minimize infection transmission associated with youth and adult sporting activities
- the care of domestic animals and management of infectious agents associated with wildlife
- hygiene practices to mitigate infection transmission as a result of climate-related emergencies such as drought, flooding, extreme heat and water contamination
- future pandemics and emerging pathogens

The mission will continue the IFH commitment to applying the latest scientific understanding in developing and promoting practices that are based on risk management, together with the appropriate messaging for 21st century hygiene



in American homes and public spaces (see Further Reading). We will use the wealth of existing IFH resources and establish an IFH-USA webpage. Following the UK model, we will create a US Home Hygiene Development Group which brings together North American-based experts from both public and private sectors, including infection prevention and control

practitioners and scientists in the fields of microbiology, public health, hygiene, cleaning & disinfection, epidemiology and behaviour change. It will also be important for us to engage in two-way conversations with the American public and health educators.

Our goals are threefold:

1. Develop hygiene resiliency by working towards the establishment of a leadership structure in the USA for home and community hygiene
2. Adopt and promote an effective and sustainable Targeted Hygiene approach for home and everyday life
3. Improve public understanding and best habits related to how and when to engage in hygiene practices.

Our aim is that IFH-USA will become the “go-to” organization on issues related to hygiene and infectious diseases in home and everyday life and a source of information for a number of outlets including the media, NGO’s, industry, professional organizations and industry trade associations. We welcome expressions of interest in this work. Please email Elizabeth Scott at scotte2@simmons.edu to engage in further discussion.

Further reading:

- (1) Elizabeth A. Scott, Elizabeth Bruning, Raymond W. Nims, Joseph R. Rubino, Mohammad Khalid Ijaz. 2020. A 21st Century View of Infection Control in Everyday Settings: Moving from the

Germ Theory of Disease to the Microbial Theory of Health. American Journal of Infection Control.
[https:// www.ajicjournal.org/article/S0196-6553\(20\)30310-2/fulltext](https://www.ajicjournal.org/article/S0196-6553(20)30310-2/fulltext)

(2) Scott E, Bruning E, Ijaz MK. Decontamination of environmental surfaces in everyday settings. In: McDonnell G, Hansen J, editors. Block's disinfection, sterilization, and preservation, 6th edition: Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer; 2020.

To Learn more about the IFH and its work, go to www.ifh-homehygiene.org

To learn more about the IFH risk management/Targeted Hygiene approach – go to [Developing and promoting hygiene in home and everyday life to meet 21st Century needs](#)

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