Hand hygiene

Information booklet for staff

Handwashing is the simplest and easiest way of preventing the spread of infection.
Introduction

Healthcare Associated Infections (HCAI) cost the NHS in excess of £1 billion per year. Currently, national studies show approximately 1 in 9 patients acquire an HCAI. Control of HCAI is a major challenge to NHS Trusts.

Every person’s hands are naturally colonised with their own resident micro-organisms (also referred to as normal skin flora); these do not readily transfer to others. Hands become contaminated with transient micro-organisms by direct contact with patients; indirectly by handling equipment and through contact with the general environment. These transient micro-organisms are easily transferred from person to person and also from person to equipment/environment.

*Hand hygiene is the single most effective method in preventing the transmission of infectious agents during the delivery of care. Health Protection Agency 2005*

Hand decontamination has a dual role to protect both the patient and the Healthcare Worker from acquiring micro-organisms that may cause them harm.

My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene

The World Health Organisation (2009) initiative ‘My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene’ defines the key moments when healthcare/social care workers should perform hand hygiene. This evidence-based, field-tested, user-centred approach is designed to be easy to learn, logical and applicable in a whole wide range of settings.

These 5 moments can be translated into any healthcare setting including wards, clinics, community homes or the patients’ own home. Regardless of where the patient is being cared for or treated the principles of hand decontamination remain the same.

There may be some situations where performing hand hygiene after every contact is inappropriate. For example where staff are involved in social interaction or group activities. It is for the healthcare/social care workers to risk assess each situation and act appropriately. Once the activity or interaction is completed staff must ensure they clean their hands immediately.
1. **Before patient contact**
   - **When?** Clean your hands before touching a patient when approaching him or her.
   - **Why?** To protect the patient against harmful germs carried on your hands.

2. **Before an aseptic task**
   - **When?** Clean your hands immediately before any aseptic task.
   - **Why?** To protect the patient against harmful germs, including the patient’s own germs, entering his or her body.

3. **After body fluid exposure**
   - **When?** Clean your hands immediately after an exposure risk to body fluids (and after glove removal)
   - **Why?** To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs.

4. **After patient contact**
   - **When?** Clean your hands after touching a patient and his or her immediate surroundings when leaving.
   - **Why?** To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs.

5. **After contact with patient surroundings**
   - **When?** Clean your hands after touching any object or furniture in the patient’s immediate surroundings, when leaving – even without touching the patient.
   - **Why?** To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs.
Social Hand Hygiene

In addition to the ‘5 Moments’ hands must also be decontaminated before and/or after other activities:

- Preparing, handling or consuming food or drink
- After visiting the toilet or changing nappies
- Handling clinical waste and used/contaminated linen
- After handling specimens
- After any cleaning procedure
- Before entering and leaving a hospital or care home
- Before entering and leaving a ward or clinic
- Before entering and leaving an isolation room/area
- After touching pets or their waste.

Choice of Cleansing Agent

Liquid Soap and Water

For routine daily activities handwashing with liquid soap and water is sufficient

Alcohol Based/Alcohol Free Hand Rubs

These can be used for rapid disinfection of hands in many situations. They cannot be used if:

- Hands are visibly soiled
- The patient has vomiting/diarrhoea
- There is direct contact with any body fluid
- There are suspected or confirmed cases of Norovirus, Clostridium difficile or other gastroenteritis.

In these instances liquid soap and water must be used.

Antiseptic Detergents

These are solutions such as Povidone Iodine and Chlohexidine 4% scrub. These are used for procedures that require a surgical scrub before performing the procedure. They are not recommended for routine hand washing.

Soapy Hand Wipes

These are an acceptable alternative for community staff visiting patients’ homes and other premises where the hand washing facilities are inadequate/
non-existent. When using these wipes the full hand hygiene technique must still be followed.

**Hand Hygiene Technique**

The diagram below shows the areas most commonly missed during hand hygiene. A good technique covering all surfaces of the hands is essential. The Department of Health initiative ‘Bare Below Elbows’ supports NHS Trusts’ Dress Code/Uniform and Hand Hygiene Policies. (Please refer to the RDaSH NHS FT policies for further guidance). It is to promote good and effective hand hygiene practices thus helping reduce the risk of cross infection and the acquiring of HCAIs by patients and staff.

**Dress Code / Hand Hygiene Best Practice Summary:**

- No nail varnish or nail art
- No false/acrylic/gel nails
- No stoned/engraved rings – just 1 plain band
- No wristwatch/wrist jewellery/fitness trackers
- Short sleeves or long sleeves rolled up
- Finger nails short and clean
- No dermal piercings to hands/forearms.
Hand-washing technique with soap and water

1. Wet hands with water
2. Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces
3. Rub hands palm to palm
4. Rub back of each hand with palm of other hand with fingers interlaced
5. Rub palm to palm with fingers interlaced
6. Rub with back of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked
7. Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hand using a rotational movement
8. Rub tips of fingers in opposite palm in a circular motion
9. Rub each wrist with opposite hand
10. Rinse hands with water
11. Use elbow to turn off tap
12. Dry thoroughly with a single-use towel
13. Hand washing should take 15–30 seconds

Hand hygiene for staff
Handrub technique

1. Apply a small amount (about 3 ml) of the product in a cupped hand
2. Rub hands together palm to palm, spreading the handrub over the hands
3. Rub back of each hand with palm of other hand with fingers interlaced
4. Rub palm to palm with fingers interlaced
5. Rub back of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked
6. Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hand using a rotational movement
7. Rub tips of fingers in opposite palm in a circular motion
8. Rub each wrist with opposite hand
9. Wait until product has evaporated and hands are dry (do not use paper towels)
10. The process should take 15–30 seconds
Taps

Use your paper towels to turn off taps that are not sensor/elbow/wrist operated to prevent contaminating your clean hands.

Hand Care

Frequent handwashing and use of hand rubs and glove usage can cause damage to skin, particularly if techniques are poor. Intact skin is the most effective barrier to microorganisms so remember:

- Use an aqueous based hand cream regularly
- Cover cuts/abrasions with a waterproof dressing
- Wet hands before applying soap
- Dry hands thoroughly
- Always decontaminate hands after removing gloves.

This information is correct at the time of publishing
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