

Hand Hygiene

Hand washing is the single most important way to stop the spread of infection. Hands may look clean, but germs are always present - some are harmful, some are not. Getting rid of germs is the most important way of to stop them spreading to other people.

Staff should make sure they are "bare below the elbows" when delivering direct care to service users ie free from long sleeved clothing, wrist and hand jewellery (other than one plain band ring). This is best practice and makes it easier to follow good hand hygiene procedures. Long sleeves, if worn, should be rolled up to the elbows.

Key hand washing triggers

Your five moments for hand hygiene at the point of care:

- Immediately before direct service user contact
- Immediately before a clean/aseptic procedure
- Immediately after any exposure to body fluids
- Immediately after direct service user contact
- Immediately after contact with service user's surroundings



Other examples of when immediate hand hygiene should be performed:

- At the start of your shift and before you go home
- Whenever hands are visibly dirty
- Before putting on and after the removal of gloves
- After you have coughed or sneezed
- After you have been to the toilet
- After having a tea/coffee/lunch break

Liquid soap and alcohol hand rub



Routine hand washing should take 40-60 seconds. Using liquid soap, warm water and paper towels is seen as best practice.

Alcohol hand rub offers a practicable and acceptable alternative to hand washing in most situations, providing hands are not visibly dirty. Using alcohol hand rub should take 20-30 seconds). It should be applied to all areas of the hand until the alcohol rub dries.

Hand washing with liquid soap and warm water is vital when caring for service users who have diarrhoea. **Alcohol hand rub should not be used when caring for service users with Clostridium Difficile and Norovirus (viral gastroenteritis), as it is not effective.**

Good hand hygiene practice

- Cover wounds, cuts and grazes with a waterproof dressing to help prevent infections.
- Be 'bare below the elbows' (if a plain band ring is worn, ensure the area under the ring is washed thoroughly).
- To reduce micro-organisms on nails, keep them clean, short and free from nail varnish, false/gel nails and nail jewellery.
- Dry hands thoroughly using paper towels as wet hands are more likely to transfer micro-organisms than dry hands. The friction also helps to get rid of even more micro-organisms on the hands.
- Regular use of moisturising hand cream or lotion helps prevent skin becoming dried and cracked. Dry, cracked skin creates an ideal environment for micro-organisms to multiply.

Test your knowledge

<i>Please tick the correct answers</i>	True	False
1. Hand washing with liquid soap, warm water and paper towels is best practice.		
2. Alcohol hand rub is not effective against Clostridium Difficile.		
3. Alcohol hand rub can be used on visibly dirty hands.		
4. Routine hand washing should take 40-60 seconds		

REMEMBER:

- **Hand washing is the single most important way of prevent the spread of infection.**
- **Hands that are not dried properly transfer micro-organisms more easily.**

Factsheet Checklist *Please tick appropriate box when activity has been completed*

Check that your colleagues "bare below the elbows" when delivering direct care to service users.	
To promote good hand hygiene practices, encourage service users to ask staff if they have washed their hands.	