

Guidance at a Glance – Hand Hygiene

These guidelines support the delivery of care in community and social care settings. This guidance reflects best practice/national guidelines.

KEY POINTS

Hand washing is the single most important way to prevent the spread of infection. Hands may look clean, but micro-organisms (germs) are always present, some harmful, some not. Removal of the micro-organisms is the most important factor in preventing them of being transferred to others.

For best practice and to facilitate good hand hygiene, staff ensure they are "**bare below the elbows**" when delivering direct care to service users e.g. free from long sleeved clothing, wrist and hand jewellery (other than one plain band ring). Long sleeves, if worn, should be rolled up to the elbows.

Routine hand washing should take 40-60 seconds. The use of liquid soap, warm water and paper towels is 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

WHEN SHOULD HANDS BE WASHED?

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



GOOD PRACTICE

- Cover wounds, cuts and grazes with a waterproof dressing to reduce the risk of acquiring an infection.
- 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 and short, 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 further reduce the micro-organisms on the hands.
- Regular use of moisturising hand cream or lotion helps prevent skin becoming dried and cracked. Dry and cracked skin creates an ideal environment for micro-organisms to multiply

- Royal college of Nursing (2017) Updated November 2020 Essential Practice for Infection Prevention and Control. Hand Hygiene. Available from: [Safe staffing handwashing guidel Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](https://www.rcn.org.uk) [accessed on 14.08.24].
- Loveday et al (2014). epic3: National Evidence-Based Guidelines for Preventing Healthcare-Associated Infections in NHS Hospitals in England. Journal of Hospital Infection 86S1 (2014) S1–S70