






# Hand Hygiene

## Fact Sheet For Patients & Visitors



Hand hygiene refers to removing or killing microorganisms (germs) on the hands. When performed correctly, hand hygiene is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases and infections in the hospital, hand hygiene is used to get rid of germs that have been picked up via contact with patients, contaminated equipment or the environment. Hand hygiene may be performed either by using soap and running water, or with alcohol-based hand rubs.



### In health care, hand hygiene is required:

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- Before and after contact with any patient/resident, their body substances or items contaminated by them
  - Between different procedures on the same patient/resident
  - Before and after performing invasive procedures
  - Before preparing, handling, serving or eating food or feeding a patient/resident
  - After assisting patients/residents with personal care (e.g. assisting patient to blow nose, toileting or doing wound care)
  - Before putting on and after taking off gloves
  - After performing personal functions (e.g. using the toilet, blowing your nose)
  - When hands come into contact with secretions, excretions, blood and body fluids (use soap and running water whenever hands are visibly soiled)


### When should soap and water be used?

The mechanical action of washing, rinsing and drying removes transient bacteria present on the hands. Hand washing with soap and running water must be performed whenever hands are visibly soiled.

### How do I use soap and water?

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1. Remove hand and arm jewellery and wet your hands with warm (not hot) running water.
  2. Add soap, and then rub your hands together, making a soapy lather. Do this for at least 15 seconds, being careful not to wash the lather away. Wash the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
  3. Rinse your hands well under warm running water, using a rubbing motion.
  4. Wipe and dry hands gently with paper towel. Rubbing vigorously with paper towels can damage the skin.
  5. Turn off tap using paper towel so that you do not recontaminate your hands.


### When should alcohol-based hand rubs be used?



Alcohol-based hand rubs/gels/rinses are the preferred method for decontaminating hands, provided they contain more than 70% alcohol. They are widely used in health care settings, or in situations where running water is not available.


Using alcohol-based hand rub is better than washing hands (even with an antibacterial soap) when hands are not visibly soiled.

### Won't frequent hand hygiene dry my skin?




Intact skin is the first line of defense against microorganisms, hence it is important to maintain good skin care. To prevent chafing, wet your hands before applying soap and use mild lotion soap with warm water; pat rather than rub hands dry; and apply lotion liberally and frequently. Most alcohol-based hand rubs contain emollients to reduce the incidence of skin irritation. Frequent use of alcohol-based hand rub actually lessens the incidence of skin breakdown, as it does not subject hands to the friction and abrasion involved in hand washing and drying hands.



### How do I use alcohol-based hand rubs?



Alcohol-based hand rubs should only be used if no visible dirt is present on the hands.

1. Remove hand and arm jewellery.
  2. Apply enough antiseptic to make about the size of a quarter onto your hands, enough when you rub your hands together to cover all areas of your hands, including under your nails (1-2 pumps).
  3. Use a rubbing motion to evenly distribute the antiseptic product over all surfaces of the hands, particularly between fingers, fingertips, back of hands and base of thumbs.
  4. Rub hands until your hands feel dry (minimum 15 seconds).
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### Other Tips

- If you wear hand jewellery when performing hand hygiene, be aware that Jewellery is very hard to clean and hides bacteria and viruses from the mechanical action of the washing/rubbing
  - Artificial nails, nail enhancements or long (>3-4mm) nails, trap bacteria and are difficult to keep clean
  - Chipped nail polish, may trap bacteria along the edges
  - DON'T use a single damp cloth to wash a group of patient's/resident's/children's hands.
  - DON'T use a standing basin of water to rinse hands
  - DON'T use a common hand towel.
  - DON'T use sponges or non-disposable cleaning cloths. Remember that germs thrive on moist surfaces
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**It's OK To Ask Your Doctor, Nurse or Other Healthcare Provider to Wash Their Hands Before They Touch You or Your Loved One**

If you have questions regarding cuts, sores, allergies or pre-existing skin conditions, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0007

**If you have other questions contact The Infection Prevention & Control Department  
@ ext. 2356 or 2449**

