



# PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF INFECTIONS IN HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE SETTINGS

## HAND HYGIENE: SPREAD PROTECTION...NOT INFECTION

This PSHSA Fast Fact is intended to promote the use of effective hand hygiene while working in the health and community care sector.



### WHAT IS HAND HYGIENE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Hand hygiene is a general term that applies to hand-washing and the use of alcohol-based hand rubs (ABHR). Hands are by far one of the most common sources of transmission of micro-organisms in your workplace. Proper hand hygiene removes unwanted germs and can reduce healthcare acquired infection rates by 50%! In addition to protecting patients/residents/clients, good hand hygiene practices also protect staff.

### WHY ABHR ARE THE PREFERRED METHOD OF HAND HYGIENE?

- Do not require a sink or plumbing so can be easily accessed in any setting
- Faster to perform than traditional hand-washing
- More effective than soap and water providing hands are not visibly soiled or contaminated with spore forming pathogens such as *Clostridium difficile*
- Better tolerated by hands than soap and water and less likely to cause dermatitis.

Several well documented studies have shown that alcohol-based hand rubs are effective and convenient to use. For more information refer to the CHICA Canada website for hand hygiene resources

[http://www.chica.org/links\\_handhygiene.php](http://www.chica.org/links_handhygiene.php)

### WHEN AND HOW SHOULD I CONDUCT HAND HYGIENE?

Careful consideration to opportunities for hand hygiene and the use of proper technique is essential to prevent and control the transmission of infections among patients/clients/residents, staff and visitors.



### Hand Hygiene should be performed

1. Before initial contact with a patient/client and his/ her environment
2. Before an aseptic procedure (using and maintaining sterile equipment and fluids)
3. After a risk of exposure to body fluids and following removal of protective gloves
4. After contact with the patient/client and his/her environment

### Additional indications include:

1. When your hands are visibly soiled
2. Before handling food and/or eating
3. Frequently during communicable disease outbreaks and cold and flu season; especially after touching/ handling “high touch” objects such as door knobs and computer keyboards
4. After personal body functions such as using the washroom or blowing your nose
5. After close contact with potentially infectious people and/or their immediate environment

### Three-steps for cleaning your hands with ABHR

1. Apply the alcohol-based product to the palm of one hand (read the label instructions on the amount to apply).
2. Rub hands together making sure to cover all surfaces of your hands and fingers. Remember to rub your thumbs, the areas between your fingers and the surface of your nails.
3. Rub until your hands are dry – 20-30 seconds.

### Six steps for hand washing with soap and water

1. Wet your hands with warm (not hot) water. Frequent washing in hot water may cause skin problems such as dermatitis.
2. Apply liquid soap from a dispenser.
3. Rub your hands together for 40-60 seconds making sure to cover all surfaces including thumbs, between fingers and nail surfaces.
4. Rinse your hands well and dry them with a disposable paper towel.
5. Use the towel to turn of the tap and to handle the doorknob (whenever possible).
6. Discard the used towel in a waste receptacle.

### HOW TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY SKIN AND NAILS

- Do not wear artificial nails. They may harbour infectious agents or puncture protective gloves.
- Avoid washing your hands immediately before or after using alcohol-based hand rub since this may lead to dermatitis.
- Dry your hands completely before applying gloves.
- Use moisturizing hand lotion regularly, at least once a day.
- Keep your nails short.
- Do not wear rings or bracelets when delivering direct patient care.



## EVALUATING YOUR HAND HYGIENE PROGRAM

The World Health Organization (WHO) Hand Hygiene Self Assessment Framework is a systematic tool designed to evaluate the hand hygiene program of an individual healthcare facility. This allows organizations to identify key issues requiring attention and improvement. The tool is available at [https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/hhsa\\_framework/en/](https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/hhsa_framework/en/)

An evidence based hand hygiene program called “Just Clean Your Hands”, was created by Ontario, for healthcare workplaces to improve hand hygiene practices: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/jcyh-quick-guide.pdf?la=en>

---

### REMINDER

- *Gloves are not a substitute for hand hygiene*
- *Hand hygiene should not be performed while wearing gloves as it can compromise the integrity of the gloves and promote dermatitis*

---

## NEED MORE INFORMATION?

The following additional resources are recommended:

- Best Practices for Hand Hygiene in All Health Care Settings: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/bp-hand-hygiene.pdf?la=en>
- Just Clean Your Hands: Ontario’s evidence based hand hygiene program: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/health-topics/infection-prevention-control/hand-hygiene#.UcMA6tjxl8c>
- Stop! Clean Your Hands: Canada’s Hand Hygiene campaign developed in conjunction with CHICA-Canada, the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation, the Canadian Patient Safety Institute and the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca/en/Events/StopCleanYourHandsDay/Pages/default.aspx>
- Public Health Ontario Hand Hygiene: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/health-topics/infection-prevention-control/hand-hygiene>
- Hand Hygiene Fact Sheets: <https://www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca/en/toolsResources/pages/fact-sheets.aspx>