

Hand Hygiene: Help Prevent the Spread of Germs and Infections in the Hospital

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infections. This includes the common cold, influenza, stomach illnesses, and even hard-to-treat infections such as methicillin-resistant staph aureus (MRSA).

- Infections you get in the hospital can be life-threatening and hard to treat.
- All patients are at risk for hospital infections.
- You can take action by asking both your health care providers and visitors to wash their hands.

When to Practice Hand Hygiene

You should practice hand hygiene:

- before preparing or eating food
- before touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- before and after changing wound dressings or bandages
- after using the restroom or changing diapers
- after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- after touching hospital surfaces such as bed rails, bedside tables, doorknobs, remote controls or the phone.



It only takes 20 seconds of using either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub to remove the germs that cause infections.

How to Practice Hand Hygiene

There are 2 different ways to clean your hands.

Soap and water

Use soap and water:

- when your hands look dirty
- if you have diarrhea or a stomach virus (hand sanitizers may not kill all of these viruses)
- after you use the bathroom or change a diaper
- before you prepare and eat food.

You should always use soap and water to clean your hands if you have diarrhea or you have been diagnosed with *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff) infection.

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To wash your hands:

- Wet your hands with warm water and apply soap.
- Rub your hands together until the soap forms a lather and then rub all over the top of your hands, in between your fingers and the area around and under your fingernails.
- Continue rubbing your hands for 20 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel. Then use your paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the door, if needed.

Alcohol-based hand rub

Use an alcohol-based hand rub:

- when your hands do not look dirty
- if soap and water are not available.

To clean your hands:

- Follow directions on the bottle for how much of the product to use.
- Rub hands together and then rub product all over the top of your hands, in between your fingers and the area around and under your fingernails.
- Continue rubbing for 20 seconds until your hands are dry.

Your Visitors

Your visitors should also practice hand hygiene:

- when entering and leaving your room
- after using the restroom or changing diapers
- before and after helping with or performing cares (such as bathing and grooming)
- before helping with meals.



You, your visitors and your health care providers should practice hand hygiene.

Your Health Care Team

Your health care providers should practice hand hygiene:

- every time they enter your room
- before and after touching you
- before and after wearing gloves
- before and after touching lines, drains and devices.

You Can Make a Difference in Your Own Health

Health care providers know they should practice hand hygiene, but they sometimes get distracted. Your friendly reminders are welcome.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.