

Hand hygiene is the single most important method of preventing and controlling infection.

The hands normally have a "resident" population of micro-organisms. Other micro-organisms are picked up during every-day activities, and these are termed "transient" organisms.

Many infection control problems are caused by these transient organisms.

Hand washing with soap & warm water should remove these transient organisms before they are transferred to surfaces, another patient or to a susceptible area on the same patient.

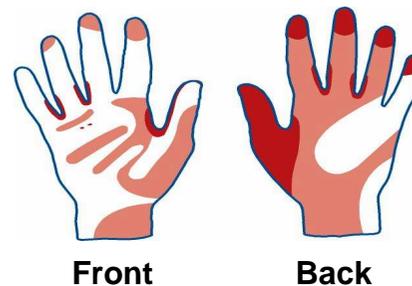
In addition to washing with soap and water an alcohol rub will increase the removal of transient bacteria and should be used prior to clean or aseptic procedures, e.g. dressing changes, giving injections.

Using an alcohol rub is a useful alternative when the hands are not visibly dirty, or when adequate hand washing facilities are not available.

It is important that hand washing is carried out correctly to prevent the spread of infection.

Studies show that health care staff frequently use poor hand washing techniques and the most commonly neglected areas are the tips of the fingers, palm of the hand, and the thumb.

Areas of hands frequently missed



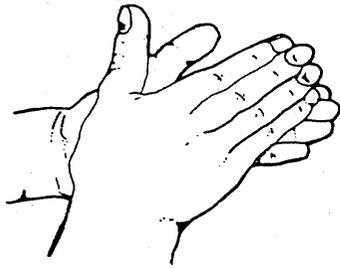
Good practice

- Fingernails should be kept clean and short.
- Do not wear false-nails or nail polish
- Jewellery (including a wrist watch) should not be worn, except a plain wedding band.
- Breaks anywhere on the skin should be covered with a waterproof dressing.
- Medical advice should be sought for skin damage caused by other medical conditions e.g. eczema, psoriasis.
- All healthcare staff should be 'bare below the elbow'.

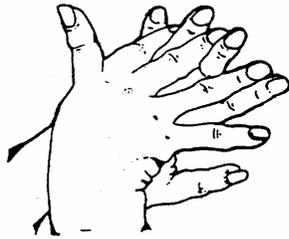
Hands should be washed:

- After visiting the toilet
- Before handling food
- When the hands are visibly soiled.
- Before a 'clean' procedure.
- After a 'dirty' procedure, even if gloves were worn.
- Between care episodes for one patient.
- Between different patients.
- After coughing or sneezing into hands

Hand Washing Technique: Wet hands and apply soap



1. Palm to palm



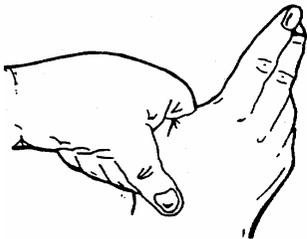
2. Right palm over left dorsum and left palm over right dorsum



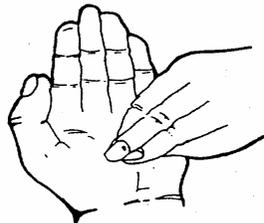
3. Palm to palm fingers



4. Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



5. Rotational rubbing of right thumb clasped in left palm and vice versa



6. Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa

- Also, wash wrists
- Dry hands thoroughly
- Applying hand cream will assist with maintaining skin integrity

Equipment needed for effective hand washing

- Wash hand basin
- Liquid soap
- Disposable paper towels
- Foot operated pedal bin

Method of applying an alcohol hand rub

When using an alcohol rub, the preparation should be rubbed into all areas of the hands, again paying attention to the thumbs, fingertips, between the fingers and the backs of the hands (see diagram 1) until the hands feel dry. Sufficient must be used to treat all areas of the hands.

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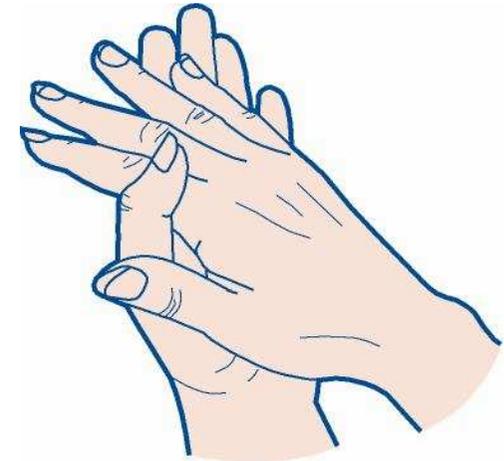
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HAND HYGIENE FOR HEALTH CARE and SOCIAL CARE STAFF

STOP!



Have You Washed Your Hands?