Hand Hygiene is the #1 way to prevent the spread of infections

Why? You can take action by practicing hand hygiene regularly and by asking those around you to practice it as well.

When? You and your loved ones should clean your hands very often, especially after touching objects or surfaces in the hospital room, before eating, and after using the restroom. Your healthcare provider should practice hand hygiene every time they enter your room.

How? It only takes 15 seconds of using either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub to kill the germs that cause infections.

Which? Use soap and water when your hands look dirty; otherwise, you can use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Who? You, your loved ones, and your healthcare providers should practice hand hygiene.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/handhygiene or call 1-800-CDC-INFO

CDC acknowledges the following partners in the development of the *Hand Hygiene Saves Lives* video: the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology and Safe Care Campaign.

This brochure was developed with support from the CDC Foundation and Kimberly-Clark Corporation.

A Patient's Guide

Hand Hygiene Saves Lives

hand hygiene

- Washing hands with soap and water.
- Cleansing hands using an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Preventing the spread of germs and infections.

CDC

hand hygiene saves lives

Why?

To prevent hospital infections.

- In the United States, hospital patients get nearly 2 million infections each year. That's about 1 infection per 20 patients!
- 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 healthcare providers and visitors to wash their hands.

Remember: Hand hygiene saves lives.

To make a difference in your own health.

- Hand hygiene is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infections, including the common cold, flu, and even hard-to-treat infections, such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA.

When?

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.
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- After touching hospital surfaces such as bed rails, bedside tables, doorknobs, remote controls, or the phone.

Healthcare providers should practice hand hygiene:

- Every time they enter your room.*
- Before putting on gloves. Wearing gloves alone is not enough to prevent the spread of infection.
- After removing gloves.

Remember: Ask your doctors and nurses to clean their hands before they examine you.

* If you already have an infection, your healthcare providers may take special measures (isolation precautions) to prevent the spread of your infection to others. They might enter your room wearing protective equipment (e.g., gloves, gown, mask). You do not need to ask them to clean their hands because they should have done so before they put on gloves.

How?

With soap and water:

1. Wet your hands with warm water. Use liquid soap if possible. Apply a nickel- or quarter-sized amount of soap to your hands.
2. Rub your hands together until soap forms a lather and then rub all over the top of your hands, in between your fingers and the area around and under the fingernails.
3. Continue rubbing your hands for 15 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
4. Rinse your hands well under running water.
5. Dry your hands using a paper towel if possible. Then use your paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the door if needed.

Remember: It only takes 15 seconds to protect yourself and others.

With an alcohol-based hand rub:

1. Follow directions on the bottle for how much of the product to use.
2. Rub hands together and then rub product all over the top of your hands, in between your fingers and the area around and under the fingernails.
3. Continue rubbing until your hands are dry. If enough rub was used to kill germs, it should take at least 15 seconds of rubbing before your hands feel dry. You should not rinse your hands with water or dry them with a towel.

Which?

Use soap and water:

- When your hands look dirty.
- After you use the bathroom.
- Before you eat or prepare food.

Use an alcohol-based hand rub:

- When your hands do not look dirty.
- If soap and water are not available.

Alcohol based hand rubs

- Products that kill germs on the hands.
- Should contain 60% to 95% ethanol or isopropanol (types of alcohol).
- Are fast-acting and convenient.

Who?

You can make a difference in your own health:

- Healthcare providers know they should practice hand hygiene, but they sometimes forget. Most welcome your friendly reminder.
- Ask healthcare providers to practice hand hygiene in a polite way — tell them that you know how easy it is for people to get infections in the hospital and that you don't want it to happen to you.

Remember: Take control of your health, practice hand hygiene.