

Hand Hygiene and Reducing Infection

Information for patients and visitors



This information is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please telephone 01270 612190.

The hands are one of the major ways infections can be passed on. Effective hand hygiene has been described as the single most important means of preventing the spread of infection.

Why do we need to wash our hands?

Even hands which appear clean can be carrying germs. These germs cannot be seen by the naked eye, we need a microscope to do this. Often these germs are harmless but may be more serious when brought into hospital.

These germs are often passed from one person to another by physical contact so it is important that patients, visitors and staff reduce the risk of spreading infection by regularly cleaning their hands.

When should we wash our hands?

Patients

Please wash your hands using soap and water or use the hand sanitisers provided:

- Before eating (both snacks and meals)
- Before and after touching your wounds or catheter
- After using the toilet, bathroom or commode
- After changing a baby's nappy or helping to toilet a child or adult
- After coughing or sneezing into the hands
- Whenever you can see your hands are dirty

If you are unable to get to a sink, please ask your nurse for some hand wipes.

Visitors

Please wash your hands using soap and water or use the hand sanitisers provided:

- When arriving on the ward you are visiting
- Before touching food, for example, if you are helping a relative/friend with their meal
- After using the toilet, changing a nappy or helping your relative/friend to the toilet
- When leaving the ward you are visiting.

Please note that hands must be washed with soap and water if:

- Visiting someone with diarrhoea
- Visiting someone in a side room or if a friend/relative nursed in a bay has a known or suspected infection
- Hands are visibly dirty
- If you have given or assisted in direct personal care

Staff

The staff on your ward should all be trained in hand washing techniques and will not be offended if you ask them whether they have washed or cleansed their hands with the hand sanitiser. Feel free to ask this question any time to a member of staff is about to care for you or examine you. This may be on your ward/department or anywhere else in the hospital (e.g. x-ray).

There are certain times when it is appropriate for staff to clean their hands with hand sanitiser. For example:

- When performing basic care, examinations or tests
- When gloves are not worn

Hand washing technique with soap and water



Wet hands with water



Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces



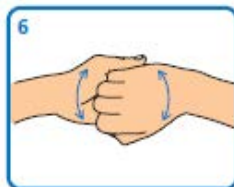
Rub hands palm to palm



Rub back of each hand with palm of other hand with fingers interlaced



Rub palm to palm fingers interlaced



Back of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



Rub each thumb clapsed in opposite hand using rotational movement



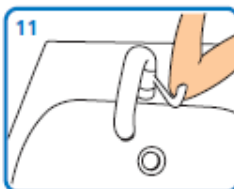
Rub tips of fingers in opposite palm in a circular motion



Rub each wrist with opposite hand



Rinse hands with water



Use elbow to turn off tap



Dry thoroughly with a single use towel

All surfaces of both hands should be vigorously massaged with the lather from the soap. Make sure you pay particular attention to your fingertips, thumbs and between your fingers, as these areas are the most commonly missed. Hand washing should take 15-30 seconds.

Rinse hands under warm water and dry thoroughly using the hand paper towels provided. Remember to open the bin using the foot pedal only, to avoid contaminating your clean hands.

Visiting

Patients are more likely to pick up germs from other people and to develop further illnesses while they are in hospital.

To help reduce infection and keep you safe and well visitors are requested not to:

- Visit outside visiting times
- Exceed the number of visitors allowed per visit
- Sit on patient's bed but to use the chairs provided
- Touch the patient's wounds, drips, catheters or other items of clinical equipment
- Use the toilets allocated for patients – visitor's toilets can be found in the Main Entrance and other locations in the hospital, staff can tell you where these are
- Visit if they:
 - feel unwell, or are suffering from nausea (sickness), vomiting or diarrhoea (should be free of symptoms for 48 hours before visiting)
 - have a cold, respiratory infection or flu-type symptoms
 - undiagnosed rashes or infectious skin conditions

Children visiting

Please consider carefully whether to bring children (particularly very young children) when visiting clinical areas. Do not allow babies or toddlers to crawl on the floors or beds, or touch clinical equipment.

Food

We restrict any food or drink brought in by visitors unless under special circumstances. If you would like to bring in your own food, this must be discussed with the Ward Manager first.

For more advice or information on infection control, please speak to your Ward Manager or contact the Infection Prevention and Control Service.

The Infection Prevention and Control Service

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