A guide to preventing illness from germs:

HAND HYGIENE
FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS

CLEAN HANDS SAVE LIVES
• 80% of infectious diseases are spread by hands.¹
• Hand hygiene is critical in preventing illness related absences.
• Canadian workers missed an average of 7.4 work days due to illness and disability in 2010, accounting for 3.6% of payroll expense.²
• Only 85% of people wash their hands after using the bathroom, only 39% wash after coughing or sneezing into their hands, and only 77% wash hands before preparing food.³
• Improved handwashing in the workplace can result in a 31% reduction in gastrointestinal illnesses (vomiting and diarrhea) and a 21% reduction in respiratory illnesses (common colds and flu).⁴
• Hospital-acquired infections are the most common serious complication of hospitalization and the fourth leading cause of death among Canadians.⁵
Healthcare workers are in frequent contact with clients and their environments, increasing the risk for transfer of microorganisms. Basic care such as changing a client’s gown, taking a temperature, or picking up a meal tray can transfer microorganisms. These bacteria and viruses can persist on hands for hours. Hand contamination does not require sustained contact with clients or their environment.

**Healthcare workers are an ideal advocate for hand hygiene with clients.**

- Perform hand hygiene in front of clients. Your hands will be clean and clients and visitors will know it.
- Talk about hand hygiene while you’re cleaning your own hands.
- Point out locations of hand sanitizer, soap dispensers, and “how-to” posters.
- Ensure empty dispensers are filled.

**Seriously though...**

**CLEAN HANDS SAVE LIVES**

**Let’s work together to achieve 100% HAND HYGIENE.**

- **WELCOME FEEDBACK** on your own hand hygiene from colleagues, patients, clients and residents.
- **PROVIDE FEEDBACK** to your colleagues about their hand hygiene performance.
- **TALK ABOUT IT** with patients, clients and residents about the importance of their own hand hygiene.
SANITIZE YOUR HANDS

Hand sanitizer is a simple easy way to kill bacteria on hands in all health care settings.

1. Apply hand sanitizer
2. Scrub palm to palm
3. Palm to back
4. Thumbs
5. Between fingers
6. Knuckles to palm
7. Fingertips

Your hands are clean!

CLEAN HANDS SAVE LIVES

Scrub for a full 15 seconds.

Visit www.germsmart.ca to view a video demonstrating proper technique using sanitizer.
**Hand Sanitizers:**

- are commonly referred to as alcohol-based hand rub.
- work by killing germs but do not remove them.
- should contain at least 70% alcohol as the active ingredient.
- should remain wet on your hands for at least 15 seconds to be effective.
- should not be topped-up or refilled.
- should be discarded passed the expiry date.
- are not recommended after using the washroom and when doing food preparation. For this, handwashing with soap and water is required.
- have little or no effect against select microorganisms, such as *C. difficile*; handwashing with soap and water is required. These clinical areas should be identified with appropriate signage.
- do not work if your hands are visibly soiled since germs hide underneath.
- are safe for children. Children should not put hands in their mouth until hands are dry (about 15 seconds) as it contains alcohol.
- should not be accessible to preschool children if unsupervised.
- are flammable, so should not be stored near a heat or electrical source.
WASH YOUR HANDS

Handwashing with soap and water is necessary after using the washroom, before preparing food, any time hands are visibly soiled and when in contact with select microorganisms such as C. difficile.

Visit www.germsmart.ca to view a video demonstrating proper technique for handwashing with soap and water.
USING SOAP, SCRUBBING, RINSING AND DRYING ALL WORK TOGETHER TO REMOVE GERMS.

**Use plain liquid soap**

- Routine use of antimicrobial soap is not recommended as it may lead to resistance. “Triclosan” is the most common antimicrobial agent in soap.\(^6\)
- Liquid soap should never be “topped up” or refilled. Germs can grow over time in the dispenser.
- Bar soap should not be used by healthcare workers. Germs can be spread by the bar of soap itself.

**Use paper towel**

- Single use paper towel should be used in all healthcare settings. Shared towels spread germs from person to person.
- Paper towel should be used to turn taps off and to open the bathroom door. This avoids getting germs on hands after washing them.
- The rubbing action used during drying removes more germs.
- Moist hands promote germ growth, so dry hands well.
- Air dryers are not recommended as they have been shown to blow germs around the room and increase germs on hands.\(^7\)
Perform hand hygiene several times per day, especially:

- When hands are visibly soiled.
- After using the washroom.
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing into your hands, even if a tissue is used.
- Before eating or preparing food, or assisting others to eat.
- After handling garbage and other waste.
- After handling shared objects such as keyboards, telephones or charts.

These are common times when hands can spread germs that cause illness.

Clean hands save lives

DID YOU KNOW...

Damp hands spread 1,000 times more germs than dry hands.

Clean hands save lives

Wash your hands
IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS THERE ARE AN ADDITIONAL 4 MOMENTS FOR HAND HYGIENE.

**Seriously though... CLEAN HANDS SAVE LIVES**

THE 4 MOMENTS FOR HAND HYGIENE protect staff, clients and families:

- **Wash In** - Clean your hands before entering a client environment such as a hospital room, or client home.
  
  *Why? To protect the client from any harmful germs carried on your hands.*

- **Before Any Procedure** - Clean your hands immediately before any procedure such as an immunization, physical exam, medication administration, dressing change or blood draw.
  
  *Why? To protect the client from any harmful germs, including the client’s own germs, from entering their body.*

- **After Body Fluid Exposure** - Clean your hands immediately after any exposure to body fluids.
  
  *Why? To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from any harmful germs transmitted by the client.*

- **Wash Out** - Clean your hands when leaving a client environment such as a clinic room or treatment area.
  
  *Why? To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from any harmful germs transmitted by the client.*
**GLOVES**

- are not a replacement for hand hygiene.
- should never be re-used or washed.
- should be worn any time you anticipate coming into contact with blood or other potentially infectious material, such as mucous membranes or non-intact skin.
- should be changed during client care when moving from a contaminated body site to a clean body site.
- should always be worn during client care if the healthcare worker has non-intact skin on his/her hands.

*Gloves don’t eliminate the need for hand hygiene and hand hygiene doesn’t eliminate the need for gloves! Proper hand hygiene should be done before putting on and after taking off gloves.*

Frequent handwashing and glove use can be hard on skin. Remember to apply lotion frequently throughout the day to maintain skin integrity. If you have problems with the skin on your hands, contact your local OH&S to discuss alternative products for sensitive skin.

**RINGS, JEWELRY, NAILS**

Healthcare workers involved in client care as well as staff working in departments that supply items used in the care of clients should keep fingernails clean and trimmed short; artificial nails, gel nails, nail enhancements and rings with exposed stones should not be worn because they can harbor and spread infection.
Remember, your hands aren’t the only things that come into contact with the client and their environment.

Items brought into client environments such as a hospital room, treatment area or client home have the potential to transfer microorganisms.

These items require appropriate cleaning and disinfection with a hospital-grade disinfectant to prevent transmission of microorganisms from client to client, client to healthcare worker or healthcare worker to client.

Examples of these items are:

- **Stethoscope**
- **Cell**
- **Pen**
- **Pager**
- **Uniform**

**DID YOU KNOW...**

More than 90% of healthcare worker phones are contaminated with pathogenic bacteria including those known to cause nosocomial infections.®

For more information about cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting, visit [www.germsmart.ca](http://www.germsmart.ca)
OTHER GERM SMART STRATEGIES THAT PREVENT ILLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Keep your hands clean and away from your face

• Hands can pick up germs from work surfaces and from items you share with others.
• Germs can be spread when you touch your eyes, nose and mouth.

Practice respiratory precautions

• Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you sneeze or cough. This avoids spreading germs into the air or onto your hands and surfaces.
• Throw away tissues promptly and do not re-use them.
• Perform hand hygiene after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing into your hands.

Stay home when you’re sick

• Going to work with contagious respiratory (cold and flu) and gastrointestinal (vomiting and diarrhea) illness can spread germs to others.
• Staying home when you are sick keeps germs out of the workplace and protects co-workers, clients and their families.
Keep your environment clean

• Choose appropriate products and use as directed on the label. The label will indicate if the product is a “cleaner” or a “disinfectant” or both. It will provide instructions to effectively clean, disinfect, or sanitize.

• Use cleaners to lift dirt, grease and germs, allowing them to be rinsed away. Use disinfectants to kill 99.99% of common germs. Use sanitizers to reduce the germ count to a safe level.

• Clean all commonly touched surfaces daily if possible.

• Clean and disinfect surfaces between clients that may have blood, sputum, vomit, urine or feces on them, such as toilets, flush handles, stall door handles, taps, and sinks.

• Follow public health guidelines to clean and sanitize areas where food is prepared and served. These can be found at: www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

All healthcare settings are required to provide PPE for healthcare workers. PPE refers to a variety of barriers such as gloves, gowns and masks, used alone or in combination to protect mucous membranes, skin and clothing from contact with infectious microorganisms.

All healthcare workers are required to use the appropriate PPE based on the nature of the client interaction and/or mode(s) of transmission.

Immunization

Exposure to vaccine preventable diseases is a risk in healthcare settings. Protect yourself and your clients by ensuring your vaccinations are up to date.
Outbreaks

During an outbreak in a specific care unit or facility, additional precautions may be required to prevent the spread of infection. Healthcare settings should have procedures in place to alert and instruct healthcare workers, clients and visitors when additional precautions are required.

All healthcare facilities should have a policy related to hand hygiene. Make sure you are aware of your workplace policy.

Hand hygiene is an expectation of all healthcare workers. Proper and consistent hand hygiene at the point of care, will prevent the spread of most healthcare-acquired infections. As part of a commitment to the safety culture, many healthcare settings monitor, audit and report staff hand hygiene compliance. Saskatoon Health Region staff hand hygiene compliance rates are published online. All healthcare settings are encouraged to be Germ Smart and make hand hygiene part of the care routine 100% of the time!

Identify potential barriers to handwashing
in your workplace and bring them to the attention of your supervisor or manager.
IS YOUR Healthcare FACILITY GERM SMART?

Visit www.germsmart.ca for additional resources to support handwashing in your workplace.

Or contact us:
Call 306-655-4612 or email germsmart@saskatoonhealthregion.ca

3 American Society for Microbiology. (2010). Handwashing observational study. Available at: www.asm.org
5 McGeer, A. (n.d.). Partnerships for health systems improvement: Implementing effective hand hygiene programs in healthcare. Available at: www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/microbiology
6 Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. (2010). Best practices for hand hygiene in all healthcare settings.
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