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# Hand Hygiene Fact Sheet

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## What is Hand Hygiene?

Hand hygiene refers to removing or killing germs on the hands as well as keeping the skin in good condition. Healthy skin is the first line of defence against germs, therefore, careful attention to skin care is important.

## Why should we do Hand Hygiene?

Hand hygiene is the single most important thing everyone can do to reduce illness to themselves, their family, friends, co-workers and members of the community.

Hands are always at risk for picking up germs that may be harmful to one's health. Once hands have germs on them they can transfer them to other people, from item to item, and to surfaces that other people's hands come into contact with.

## What Methods are there for Hand Hygiene?

There are two methods for cleaning the hands:

1. Use if an alcohol based hand rub (ABHR) - also called hand sanitizer.
  - ABHR can be a liquid, gel or foam that contains between 60-90% alcohol (e.g. ethanol, isopropanol) which reduces the number of germs on hands.
  - AHBR with at least 70% alcohol is required in health care areas whereas 62% alcohol is good for personal and home use.
  - **ABHR is used when the hands are not visibly dirty.**
  - ABHRs contain skin softeners to reduce skin irritation.
2. Use of soap and water
  - Antimicrobial soap removes most germs from the hands and is recommended for use in health care.
  - Antimicrobial soap is in foam or liquid form.
  - This soap is to be used when hands are visibly dirty, when patient/client has diarrhea, and when ABHR is not available.

- Plain non-antimicrobial soap reduces the number of germs on the hands and it is in foam, liquid or powder forms.
- Plain non-antimicrobial soap is recommended for public washrooms, long term care, and in the community.

## When Should I do Hand Hygiene?

Hand Hygiene should be performed:

1. Before any hand contact with a client and/or their environment
2. Before any procedure using sterile equipment or fluids
3. After exposure to body fluids (i.e. blood, urine, feces, vomit)
4. After any hand contact with the client and/or their environment

Additional times you should wash your hands include:

- ✓ when your hands are dirty
- ✓ before handling food and/or eating
- ✓ before putting on gloves and after removing gloves
- ✓ before and after smoking
- ✓ after using the washroom
- ✓ after touching or blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- ✓ after caring for people with diarrhea
- ✓ after changing diapers (wash child's hands as well)
- ✓ after touching 'high touch' objects such as door knobs, toilet handles, computer keys, elevator buttons, etc.
- ✓ after touching anything that may have germs on it.

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# Hand Hygiene Guidelines

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## Hand Hygiene with Hand Sanitizer



## Hand Hygiene with Soap and Water:



- Apply approximately 1 tsp. of sanitizer to your palm.
  - Rub all areas of the hands – the palms, backs of hands, wrists, between the fingers and the nails.
  - Rub for at least 15 seconds until hands are dry. You need 15 seconds of wet contact time to kill the germs.
  - Do not rinse off.
- Wet hands under warm running water.
  - Apply soap and rub together for at least 15 seconds,.
  - Wash well between the fingers and around nails, the wrists, palms and the backs of the hands.
  - Rinse well with warm running water.
  - Dry with a hand towel or a paper towel. A single use paper towel is best.
  - Turn the tap off using a paper towel or hand towel (remember...your hands were dirty when you turned the tap on).
  - Throw the paper towel in the trash. If you are using a hand towel, do not share it with other people and wash it often.
  - Apply hand lotion on your hands at least daily to reduce skin breakdown due to frequent hand washing and to improve the health of your hands.

**Remember, hand hygiene  
is the best way to stop  
the spread of germs.**