

## Hand Hygiene: Spread Protection, Not Infection

This OSACH Fast Fact is intended to promote the use of effective hand hygiene techniques for everyone working in health care and community care settings.

### What Is Hand Hygiene and Why Is It Important?

Hand hygiene is a general term that applies to handwashing and the use of alcohol-based hand rubs.

Proper hand hygiene technique is an essential part of your program to prevent and control infections among patients/clients/residents staff and visitors in your workplace.

### When Should I Wash My Hands?

- When visibly soiled
- When contaminated with blood or body fluids
- After removing gloves
- After caring for people with diarrhea, since alcohol hand rubs are not effective against some of the organisms that cause that condition
- Before eating
- Before feeding people under your care
- Prior to handling food
- After personal functions such as using the washroom, blowing your nose

### Proper Handwashing in Five Steps

1. Wet hands with warm water
2. Apply liquid soap from a dispenser
3. Rub hands together, making sure to cover all surfaces of hands and fingers, for 15 seconds
4. Rinse hands well and dry with a paper towel
5. Use the towel to turn off the tap

### When Should I Use Alcohol-based Hand Rubs?

- When hand hygiene is required and hands are not visibly soiled
- Before and after providing care
- Between contacts with patients/residents or clients
- In situations when handwashing facilities are not readily available

- Prior to donning sterile gloves as required for specific procedures. Please note, a surgical scrub may also be required; check your organization's policy and procedure
- Prior to insertion of invasive devices. If there is a risk of contact with body fluids, excretions or secretions other than sweat, also wear gloves
- When moving from a contaminated body site to a clean body site (Assess if gloves should also be worn.)
- After touching objects or equipment that have been in contact with patients/residents when contact precautions are in place
- After removing gloves (If residue is present on your hands, wash them with soap and water.)

### The Three-step Technique

1. Apply product to palm of one hand (Read the label for instructions on the amount to apply.)
2. Rub hands together making sure to cover all surfaces of hands and fingers
3. Rub until hands are dry

### Maintaining Healthy Skin and Nails

- Treat broken skin promptly
- Use moisturizing skin-care products regularly
- Use barrier creams when appropriate (discuss with your supervisor, occupational health or infection control expert)
- Keep your nails short and clean
- Do not wear artificial nails; make sure nail polish is not chipped
- Keep jewellery to a minimum, e.g., watch and ring

### Need More Information?

Talk to your supervisor, the infection control or joint health and safety committee, an occupational health or infection control practitioner, or your union.

Refer to the OSACH website, [www.osach.ca](http://www.osach.ca), for links to infection prevention and control resources.



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