Hand Hygiene

Information for patients

It’s OK to ask: Remind your healthcare worker about cleaning their hands

Why cleaning your hands is so important in hospitals

When we are fit and healthy, our immune system protects us from infection caused by harmful germs such as bacteria or viruses.

If we become very ill, have an operation or suffer from a disease such as cancer, our natural defences to infection may be weakened. This can make us more vulnerable to infection.

Simply cleaning our hands regularly can help stop the transfer of germs from person to person. We know that even if hands look clean, harmful germs (which can be invisible to the naked eye) can be present on the skin. Removing these germs by hand washing or using an alcohol-based hand rub can minimise the spread of infection in hospital.

What happens if we don’t clean our hands?

Not cleaning our hands increases the chances of spreading infections. If a patient develops an infection, it can make them more unwell and may lengthen the time they have to stay in hospital.

How to clean your hands with soap and water

There are some germs that are not completely removed with alcohol-based hand rubs, so we recommend washing with soap and water when:

- Your hands are visibly dirty
- After you have used the toilet
- Before eating food.

The best way to wash your hands:

- Wet hands first with warm water
- Apply liquid soap (not too much about the size of a 20 cent piece)
- Rub hands together well, making sure soap covers all your hands include palms, back of your hands, fingers, thumbs and wrists (sing happy birthday twice)
- Rinse off thoroughly with warm water
- Pat dry hands with paper towel (or use an air dryer if available).
Hand Hygiene
Infection Prevention

Infection Prevention
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How to clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub

You may use alcohol-based hand rub if your hands are visibly clean. It is quick, will remove 99% of germs and is available throughout the hospital.

How to use alcohol-based hand rub

Step 1
Pump 2 squirts of gel into your palm

Step 2
Rub hands together well, making sure gel covers all your hands include palms, back of your hands, fingers, thumbs and wrists

Step 3
Keep rubbing until dry (this takes around 20 seconds).

Is it OK to Ask?

All health care workers (for example, your doctor, nurse and physiotherapist) should clean their hands regularly. This is especially important before and after they provide care to you, and immediately before and after they perform procedures involving tubes, lines or dressings on you.

If you don’t see us using hand rubs or washing our hands when you think we should, then please remind us. We care about your health so – It’s OK to ask!

Any questions?
If you would like further information please contact the Alfred Health Infection Prevention on (03) 9076 3139.

Further information:
Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Hand Hygiene Australia
www.hha.org.au/

References
Victorian Department of Health