



Hand Hygiene Australia

Hand Hygiene

Background

Everyone has germs. Our bodies are covered with germs that help us stay healthy. In addition to the germs that are usually present on our skin, we also pick up germs from contact with other people or objects in our surroundings. These germs are easy to pick up and transfer. In this way, they can cause you, or others, to get sick. Although people usually think that germs are spread through the air, the fact is that germs are most easily spread through **hand contact**.

One of the best ways to stop the spread of germs is to wash OR decontaminate your hands. Hand hygiene is a new term to describe washing or decontaminating hands.

Washing hands helps to physically remove germs by friction, and to rinse them down the drain.

Decontaminating hands reduces the amount of germs present on hands through the use of special alcohol based preparations, in the form of solutions, gels or foams.

Alcohol based preparations have two distinct advantages over soap and water:

- 1 - They kill many more germs
- 2 - They are less drying to your skin

While alcohol based preparations reduce the germs on your hands, they cannot remove visible soil or contamination. It is always important to WASH hands with soap and water any time they are visibly dirty.

When should you wash your hands with soap and water?

Adults and children should wash their hands:

- When hands are visibly dirty
- Before you eat
- Before you prepare food items
- After touching raw meats like chicken or beef
- After contact with any body fluids like blood, urine or vomit
- After changing infant or adult nappies
- After touching animals or pets
- After blowing your nose or sneezing
- After going to the toilet



When can you use alcohol based hand rubs?

Adults and children can rub hands:

- For routine cleaning of hands anytime they are visibly clean
- If you have contact with contaminated objects in the environment eg. dirty tissues
- Before and after you care for or have contact with someone who is very sick, very old or very young
- Whenever you want to decontaminate your hands

How to wash your hands correctly

How to rub your hands correctly



References:

World Alliance for Patient Safety. Who Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Healthcare (Advanced Draft): Global patient safety challenge 2005-2006: Clean care is safer care. World Health Organisation; 2005.

Prevent Infection website

www.preventinfection.org