

## WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care

### Hand Hygiene Indications

Indications for hand hygiene are as follows:

- Wash hands with soap and water when visibly dirty, when soiled with blood or other body fluids, or after using the toilet.
- Handwashing with soap and water is preferred when exposure to potential spore-forming pathogens, such as *Clostridium difficile*, is strongly suspected or proven.
- In all other clinical situations, use an alcohol-based handrub as the preferred means for routine hand antisepsis, if hands are not visibly soiled. Wash hands with soap and water if alcohol-based handrub is not available.
- Hand hygiene is needed before and after touching the patient; before touching an invasive device used for patient care, whether gloves are used; after contact with body fluids or excretions, mucous membranes, nonintact skin, or wound dressings; if moving from a contaminated body site to another body site on the same patient; after touching inanimate surfaces and objects in the immediate vicinity; and after removing gloves.
- Hand hygiene is needed before handling medication or preparing food using an alcohol-based handrub or handwashing with water and either plain or antimicrobial soap.
- Soap and alcohol-based handrub should not be used together.

### Hand Hygiene Techniques

Specific recommendations for hand hygiene technique are as follows:

- Rub a palmful of alcohol-based handrub over all hand surfaces until dry.
- When washing hands, wet hands with water and apply enough soap to cover all surfaces; rinse hands with water and dry thoroughly with a single-use towel. Whenever possible, use clean, running water. Avoid hot water, which may increase the risk for dermatitis.
- Use the towel to turn off the tap or faucet, and do not reuse the towel.
- Liquid, bar, leaf, or powdered soap is acceptable; bars should be small and placed in racks that allow drainage.

### Selecting Hand Hygiene Agents

Some specific recommendations for selection and handling of hand hygiene agents are as follows:

- Provide effective hand hygiene products with low potential to cause irritation.
- Ask for HCW input regarding skin tolerance, feel, and fragrance of any products being considered.
- Determine any known interaction between products used for cleaning hands, skin care products, and gloves used in the institution.
- Provide appropriate, accessible, well-functioning, clean dispensers at the point of care, and do not add soap or alcohol-based formulations to a partially empty dispenser.

### **Skin Care Recommendations**

Some specific recommendations for skin care are as follows:

- Educate HCWs about hand-care practices designed to reduce the risk for irritant contact dermatitis and other skin damage.
- Provide alternative hand hygiene products for HCWs with confirmed allergies to standard products.
- Provide HCWs with hand lotions or creams to reduce the risk for irritant contact dermatitis.
- Use of antimicrobial soap is not recommended when alcohol-based handrub is available. Soap and alcohol-based handrub should not be used together.

### **Recommendations for Glove Use**

Some specific recommendations for use of gloves are as follows:

- Glove use does not replace the need for hand hygiene.
- Gloves are recommended in situations in which contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials is likely.
- Remove gloves after caring for a patient, and do not reuse.
- Change or remove gloves if moving from a contaminated body site to either another body site within the same patient or the environment.

"In hand hygiene promotion programmes for HCWs, focus specifically on factors currently found to have a significant influence on behaviour, and not solely on the type of hand hygiene products," the guidelines authors write. "The strategy should be multifaceted and multimodal and include education and senior executive support for implementation. Educate HCWs about the type of patient-care activities that can result in hand contamination and about the advantages and disadvantages of various methods used to clean their hands."

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