

Frequently Asked Questions About Hand Hygiene and Gloving

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hand hygiene is the most important measure to prevent the transmission of harmful germs. Studies show that **healthcare workers follow hand hygiene guidelines only about 40% of the time**. Healthcare-associated infections, preventable most of the time, cause nearly 100,000 deaths a year in hospitals, long term care facilities, and dialysis centers. Any healthcare worker, caregiver, or person involved in direct or indirect patient care needs to be concerned about hand hygiene and should be able to perform it correctly *and* at the right time.

What does hand hygiene mean?

Hand hygiene includes *either washing hands with soap and water, or using a waterless alcohol-based antiseptic hand rub with 60-95% alcohol content*.

Alcohol-based hand rubs (foam or gel) kill germs more effectively and more quickly than hand washing with an antimicrobial soap and water. They are less damaging to skin than soap and water, resulting in less dryness and irritation. They require less time than hand washing with soap and water, and dispensers can be placed at the point of care so they are more accessible. However, there are times when soap and water are necessary.

When is it necessary to wash with soap and water instead of using an alcohol-based hand rub?

Hands should be washed with soap and water in the following circumstances:

- 1) if visibly soiled
- 2) after using the restroom
- 3) when exposed to spore-forming organisms (e.g., *C. difficile*, *B. anthracis*)
- 4) before and after handling food such as preparing and after eating a meal

Alcohol-based hand rubs can be used for all other activities related to patient care.

What is the proper procedure to use when washing with soap and water?

CDC recommends the following steps for hand washing with soap and water. Wet hands first with water, apply an amount of product recommended by the manufacturer to hands, and rub hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds, covering all surfaces of the hands and fingers. Rinse hands with water and dry thoroughly with a disposable towel. Use towel to turn off the faucet.

What is the proper procedure to use when using alcohol-based hand rub?

CDC recommends the following steps for using an alcohol-based hand rub. Apply product to palm of one hand and rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and fingers, until hands are dry.

When should someone use gloves?

Gloving is necessary:

- 1) when hands may become contaminated with blood, body fluids, excretions, or secretions, or when touching open wounds or mucous membranes, such as the mouth and respiratory tract
- 2) when touching items that are likely to be contaminated, such as urinary catheters and endotracheal tubes, and contaminated surfaces or objects

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- 3) when patient care and the environment restrictions require it (e.g., isolation and contact precautions)

What is the relationship between gloving and hand hygiene?

Hand hygiene should be performed when indicated, regardless of glove use. This means that if there is an indication for hand hygiene and an indication for glove use, hand hygiene should be performed first, and then gloves should be put on. Hand hygiene should also be performed after gloves are removed. The sequence should be: 1) perform hand hygiene, 2) put on gloves and remove gloves when task is completed, and 3) perform hand hygiene again. **Gloves are not a substitute for hand hygiene.**

What does correct glove use mean?

Putting on and removing gloves appropriately helps to protect both the healthcare person and the patient.

- 1) Put on new gloves before contact with non-intact skin or mucous membranes
- 2) Wear gloves during contact with bodily fluids or contaminated items
- 3) Remove gloves after caring for a patient – do not wear the same gloves for more than one patient
- 4) Change gloves when moving from a contaminated body site to a clean body site on a patient
- 5) Do not reuse or wash gloves

According to the CDC, even with glove use, hand hygiene is necessary after glove removal because hands can become contaminated through small defects in gloves *and* from the outer surface of gloves during glove removal. Additionally, hand hygiene should occur when indicated, regardless of glove use.

References

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