

Hand hygiene in residential and aged care

Information for healthcare workers

Why do we do hand hygiene?

Hand hygiene involves cleaning your hands to remove or kill microorganisms (germs) that can cause disease.

These potentially harmful microorganisms exist in our environment and cause no harm in their correct place (e.g., *Staphylococcus aureus* colonisation of the skin), but when introduced to the wrong part of the body, or to an immunocompromised person they can cause infection (e.g., *Staphylococcus aureus* blood stream infection).

People who receive aged and community care services or live in residential care facilities may be at greater risk of infection and poorer outcomes from those infections. This is because they often:

- are older
- have other medical conditions
- have weaker immune systems
- live in a more densely populated environment with the frequent physical movement of healthcare workers between residents or clients.

Routinely performing hand hygiene is vital to prevent the hands of healthcare workers, clients, residents and visitors from spreading infection.

When to do hand hygiene

When at work, you should perform the '5 moments for hand hygiene'. These are:

1. Before touching a client/resident
2. Before performing a procedure
3. After performing a procedure or a body fluid exposure risk
4. After touching a client/resident
5. After touching client/resident's surroundings

How to do hand hygiene

You can clean your hands either by using an ABHR or washing them with soap and water. ABHR is efficient and effective because it:

- takes less time than handwashing
- substantially reduces the number of germs on hands
- causes less skin irritation than soap and water
- is more readily accessible

If your hands are visibly dirty, you must wash them with soap and water to ensure the removal of large physical particles. You should not use ABHR directly after washing with water and soap as it may irritate your skin.

6. Dry your hands well using paper towels.

Using alcohol-based hand rubs

1. Remove rings and watches. Ensure clothing is above your wrists.
2. Apply a small amount ABHR into your cupped hands to cover the surfaces of both your hands.
3. Rub the ABHR over the front and back of your hands, over and between your fingers and fingernails, and around your wrists, ensuring all surfaces are covered.
4. Rub your hands together until they are dry.



Using soap and water

1. Remove rings and watches. Ensure clothing is above your wrists.
2. Wet your hands with warm water.
3. Apply a pump of liquid soap to your hands and lather well.
4. Rub the lather over the front and back of your hands, over and between your fingers and fingernails and around your wrists, ensuring all surfaces are covered for 20 seconds.
5. Rinse your hands under running water.

Further information and resources

The National Hand Hygiene Initiative webpage on the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care website contains information, including learning modules and factsheets, posters, videos and auditor training:

1. [National Hand Hygiene Initiative – NHHI | Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care](https://www.sqh.gov.au/nhhi)

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