Hand Hygiene
Clean hands save lives

What is hand hygiene?
Hand hygiene involves either cleaning hands with antiseptic hand rubs or washing hands with soap and water.

Hand hygiene can reduce the spread of infections that have been linked to health care settings. Hand hygiene is part of Standard Precautions, the precautions system at University of Washington Medical Center.

Why should everyone practice hand hygiene?
- To protect our own health.
- To prevent illnesses that may spread to other people from germs on our bodies.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that many infections are carried on the hands of health care workers. It is estimated that 90,000 patients die each year from these infections.

What should I do if I think that my health care providers are not practicing hand hygiene?

It is always OK to ask if anyone coming into your room has used a hand rub or has washed their hands.

- You may ask the health care worker, “Have you washed your hands?”
- Their correct response will be:
  - “Thanks, I just did,” or
  - “Thanks, I will now.”
Why does UWMC use alcohol-based hand rubs?

Alcohol-based hand rubs, both foam and gel:

- Kill germs more effectively and more quickly than washing with soap and water.
- Are less damaging to skin than soap and water, resulting in less dryness and irritation.
- Require less time than washing with soap and water.
- Are the preferred method for hand hygiene in most health care situations. The only exceptions are when your hands are visibly dirty or contaminated, or after contact with organisms like *Clostridium difficile* and norovirus.

How do I practice good hand hygiene?

**Hand rub (foam and gel):**

- Apply the hand rub to the palm of 1 hand. The amount to use depends on the hand rub product being used. There should be enough to keep your hands wet for at least 15 seconds.
- Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces. Give special attention to your fingertips and fingernails. Rub until dry.

**Hand washing:**

- Wet your hands with water.
- Apply soap.
- Rub your hands together for at least 15 seconds, covering all surfaces. Give special attention to your fingertips and fingernails.
- Rinse your hands under running water and then dry them with a disposable towel.
- Use the towel to turn off the faucet.