

Hand Hygiene

Clean hands save lives

This handout describes why hand hygiene is important to help reduce the risk of spreading disease to our patients, visitors, and health care providers.

To learn more about hand hygiene, talk with your healthcare provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control website: www.cdc.gov/handhygiene

What is hand hygiene?

Hand hygiene means cleaning hands either with hand gel or with soap and water.

Hand hygiene can reduce the spread of infections that can occur healthcare settings. Hand hygiene is part of the “Standard Precautions” we follow at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC).



Hand hygiene involves cleaning hands with either hand gel or soap and water.

Why should everyone practice hand hygiene?

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

When we practice hand hygiene, we:

- Protect our own health
- Prevent illnesses that may spread to other people from germs on our bodies

What if I think that my healthcare providers are not practicing hand hygiene?

It is always OK to ask anyone coming into your room if they have used hand gel or washed their hands.

You may ask the healthcare worker, “Have you washed your hands?” Their response will be either:

- “Thanks, I just did,” or
- “Thanks, I will now.”

Why does UWMC use alcohol-based hand gel?

Alcohol-based hand gel:

- Kill germs more effectively and more quickly than washing with soap and water.
- Is less damaging to skin than soap and water, resulting in less dryness and irritation.
- Takes less time than washing with soap and water.
- Is the preferred method for hand hygiene in most healthcare setting.

But, soap and water should be used:

- When your hands are visibly dirty or contaminated
- After contact with organisms like *Clostridium difficile* and norovirus

How do I practice good hand hygiene?

Hand Gel

- Apply the gel to the palm of one hand. The amount to use depends on the product you are using. Use 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, then dry them with a disposable towel.
- Use the towel to turn off the faucet, then throw the towel in the trash.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Infection Prevention:
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