

You may hear the term *hand hygiene* used in our centres - but what does it mean?



Hand Hygiene in Continuing Care

The Lost Art of Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene takes the concept of hand washing one step further. It means washing your hands vigorously with soap (plain or antimicrobial) and running water. It also includes using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

The majority of infections - such as the common cold - are spread with our hands. If we wash our hands frequently and perform hand hygiene correctly, it is one of the easiest ways to stay healthy.

Soap and water must **always** be used when hands are **visibly dirty**, when caring for someone who has been vomiting or experiencing diarrhea, and when assisting a resident in the washroom.

Using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer **is better than** washing your hands (even with an antibacterial soap) when hands are **not visibly dirty**. Remember to dry your hands first because water dilutes the alcohol content and makes it less effective.

Skin Care

A common concern is that frequent hand hygiene will dry the skin. Because your intact skin is the first line of defense against germs it is important to maintain good skin care. Most alcohol-based hand sanitizers contain softeners to help decrease skin irritation. Frequent use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer can actually lessen the chance of skin breakdown by decreasing the number of times your hands are subject to the friction of washing and drying.

Gloves

Remember, gloves are **never** a substitute for hand hygiene. The use of gloves can lead to a false sense of security and result in poor hand hygiene.

Outbreak Situations

Protecting yourself during an outbreak depends on your current level of health, as well as how close you are to the people and location of the outbreak. To reduce the potential of becoming ill yourself, keep fit and healthy, use frequent hand hygiene and follow all outbreak procedures.