Hand Hygiene

The best way to prevent the spread of germs (bacteria and viruses) and infections is by a process called “hand hygiene.” Good hand hygiene means either washing hands with soap and water or killing germs on the hands (decontaminating) with an alcohol-based hand rub. When you clean your hands, you remove many germs. Germs are very small and are everywhere. You cannot see them, but they spread disease. For example, they are on door handles, tables, phones, pencils, and most things that people touch. Our hands are always touching germs. Clean hands will help keep you healthy.

To prevent you and your child from getting unwanted germs, wash hands with soap and water or use a waterless alcohol-based rub every time you enter and leave the hospital room.

How to wash your hands

1. Wet your hands with warm, running water. Running water is an important part of washing away germs. Special towelettes or hand wipes should only be used when running water is not nearby. **Water basins should not be used instead of running water.** Outbreaks of illnesses have been linked with sharing wash water and wash basins or sinks.

2. Apply soap. Anti-bacterial bar or liquid soap kills more germs than regular soap and is best. Mild liquid soap should be okay if you do not have anti-bacterial soap.

3. Rub your hands together well for at least 15 seconds, making sure to clean between your fingers, under your nails, and on the backs of your hands (Picture 1). You should be able to count to 15 slowly before you are finished rubbing your hands. If children are old enough, teach them to sing the ABC song while washing.

4. Rinse your hands well under the running water (Picture 2). This is because soap left on your hands may cause dry, chapped skin.
How to wash your hands, continued

5. Dry your hands with a paper towel or clean washcloth (Picture 3).
6. Use the towel or washcloth to turn off the water (Picture 4). If you touch the water faucet after you wash your hands, you may get germs on your hands again.
7. If your hands become dry, use hand lotion after washing your hands. If using lotions, use liquids or tubes that can be squirted so that your hands do not have to touch the spout of the container.

How to use the waterless alcohol-based hand rub

1. Apply the rub to the palm of your hand.
2. Rub your hands together covering all surfaces of hands and fingers.
3. Rub until your hands are dry.

When to perform hand hygiene

Washing your hands with soap and water is always best. It is especially important to always wash with soap and water:

- Before you eat
- After you use the bathroom
- After blowing your nose or coughing or sneezing
- Any time your hands are dirty

If you cannot wash your hands, it is okay to use alcohol-based hand rub during these times:

- After changing diapers or helping a child use the potty
- After contact with body fluids like blood, urine, or throw-up (vomit)

Fingernails

Artificial nails can hide dangerous bacteria and should be avoided, especially if you are doing dressing changes or caring for a child who has lowered immunity, a central IV line, or a feeding tube.

Artificial nails include gel nails, shellac, acrylics, bonding, tips, wraps, tapes, inlays, overlays, appliques or powders. It is best to use clear polish on natural nails or leave nails unpolished.