



# GERMS? | NOT ON MY WATCH.\*

## Patient's Guide to Hand Hygiene

### The Importance of Hand Hygiene

According to Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Clean hands are one of the most important factors in preventing the spread of dangerous germs and antibiotic resistance in health care settings."

One of the best ways to stop the spread of germs is for you and your healthcare provider to practice good hand hygiene by washing or decontaminating your hands.

Washing with soap and water helps to physically remove germs and to rinse them down the drain.

Decontaminating reduces the amount of germs present on hands through the use of special alcohol-based hand rubs in the form of gels, rinses or foams. When used properly, alcohol-based hand rubs are a very effective way to decontaminate hands. However, hand rubs cannot remove visible soil or body fluid contamination. It is always important to wash your hands with soap and water any time they are visibly dirty.

#### When to Wash Your Hands

Children and adults should wash their hands with soap and water:

- When hands are visibly dirty
- Before eating
- Before preparing food items
- After contact with any body fluids such as blood, urine or vomit
- After changing infant or adult diapers
- After touching animals and pets
- After using the restroom
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- Before and after touching a sick or injured person
- Before and after visiting a hospital ward

#### How to Wash Your Hands the Right Way

- Wet hands with water.
- Apply soap to hands. Liquid soap is best; germs can live on bar soap, but if used, it should be stored on a rack between uses.
- Rub hands vigorously together for at least 15 seconds (say the ABCs or sing "Row, Row, Row your Boat" to make sure you've washed long enough).
- Cover all surfaces of hands, fingers and thumbs.
- Rinse hands well to remove soap residue.
- Dry hands gently using soft paper towels; if using cloth towels, remember that damp towels may harbor germs.
- Use towel to turn off faucet.

#### When to Use Alcohol Hand Rubs

- Perform routine cleaning of hands anytime they are not visibly dirty
- If you have contact with contaminated objects in the environment
- Before and after you care for or have contact with someone who is very sick, very old or very young
- After touching another person's intact skin (shaking hands, holding hands, especially when the other person has a cold or other illness)
- When you simply want to decontaminate hands
- When soap and water are not available

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### How to Use Alcohol Hand Rubs

- Apply product to palm of one hand.
- Rub hands together.
- Cover all surfaces of hands and fingers.
- When using alcohol hand rubs, you have used enough (about 1/2 tsp) if it takes 25-30 seconds to dry on your hands.
- Do not wipe off alcohol hand rubs. Let hands air dry.

### If You Have Dry Skin

- Choose alcohol hand rubs containing at least 60% alcohol, listed as ingredients isopropyl, ethanol or n-propanol.
- Choose alcohol hand rubs with 1-3% glycerol or other skin conditioning agents. These conditioners are added to alcohol hand rubs to restore moisture to the skin. Alcohol-based hand rubs, rinses or gels that contain conditioners cause much less skin irritation and dryness than plain or antimicrobial hand rubs.
- It is not necessary, or recommended, to routinely wash your hands after using alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Use of antimicrobial hand wipes is considered equal to hand washing; BUT not as effective in killing germs as using alcohol hand rubs.
- When used on dry or chafed skin, alcohol may cause a temporary stinging effect; however, if products are chosen carefully, the chance of this is greatly decreased.

### How to Wash Hands

Wash hands only when visibly soiled. Otherwise, use a hand rub.

Duration of the entire procedure: 40-60 seconds.



Wet hands with water



1 Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces



2 Rub hands palm to palm



3 Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa



4 Palm to palm with fingers interlaced



5 Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



6 Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa



7 Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa



8 Rinse hands with water



9 Dry thoroughly with a single use towel



10 Use towel to turn off faucet



11 Your hands are safe

### Additional Resources

For more information on ways to prevent HAIs, visit [www.HAIwatch.com](http://www.HAIwatch.com) and these websites:

[www.safecarecampaign.org](http://www.safecarecampaign.org)  
[www.ahrq.org/consumer/](http://www.ahrq.org/consumer/)  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
[www.who.int/patientsafety/en/](http://www.who.int/patientsafety/en/)  
[www.apic.org](http://www.apic.org)

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Sources used in the preparation of this document:

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<http://www.who.int>

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