Healthcare: Hand Hygiene



Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

Infections are a serious problem in healthcare facilities. Many people develop an infection while using healthcare services. Such infections are known as healthcare associated infections (HAI). There is extensive research evidence that many HAI's develop because of infections being transmitted to, and between patients, on the hands of healthcare personnel.

Hand hygiene is the single most important act you can do to reduce the transmission of healthcare-associated infections. For this reason, it is part of Standard Precautions.

What's the Danger?

Every year an estimated 2 million patients get a hospital-related infection. 90,000 people die from their infections. Since many patients at a hospital or healthcare facility are often not fully healthy, they are more at risk of developing an infection when exposed to certain germs. They are also more likely to be severely ill from the infection.

HAI is often a severe infection, so measures to prevent spread of these infections from patient to patient and between staff and patients is essential.

Hazards

- Infected body fluids (saliva, feces, blood etc.) can transfer between patients, visitors and staff.
- Germs can survive on surfaces.
- Germs can enter a patient's body from medical devices such as urinary catheters and IVs.

How to Protect Yourself

6 simple ways to keep yourself safe

1. Know the risks

- Attend regular updates and training on hand hygiene and infection control.
- Check if any patients in your area are an infection risk.
- Don’t go to work if you have an infectious illness without first working with the occupational health team.
- Know the 5 moments of hand hygiene.
- Check the environment you work in is cleaned frequently, especially hard surfaces in clinical areas.

2. Use soap and water

- Soap and water can be used for all hand hygiene.
- Liquid soap is better than a bar of soap.
- Always use soap and water if hands are visibly soiled or if Clostridium Difficile (C.Diff) contamination is possible.
    - Rub the solution thoroughly around the nail beds, fingers and thumb bases.
    - Rinse well under running water.
    - Dry thoroughly with a disposable towel.
    - Turn faucet off with towel and discard.
    - The process should take at least 40-60 seconds.
        - Sing a round of ‘Happy Birthday’ to yourself, that should take the full time.

3. Use alcohol rub

- If hands are NOT visibly soiled or there is no Clostridium Difficile contamination risk
- It is quicker
- It is generally easier to use than soap and water, especially at the point of care.
    - Cover hands with hand rub.
    - Rub the hand rub all over, especially around the thumb, base of the thumb and nail beds.
    - Rub hands together until they are dry.
    - The process should take at least 20-30 seconds.

4. 5 key moments when hand hygiene must be done

One: Before you touch a patient – to remove any harmful germs you have come in contact with.

Two: Before a clean/aseptic procedure – to reduce the risk of germs entering the person’s body.

Three: If you have come in contact with body fluids (even if you have gloves on) – to protect yourself and others from germs.

Four: After touching a patient – to remove any germs you have picked up from them.

Five: After touching the patient’s surroundings – to remove any germs from your hands and stop germs spreading.

5. Encourage patients and visitors to carry out hand hygiene regularly.

6. Remind colleagues to carry out the 5 moments of hand hygiene if you see them miss an opportunity to clean their hands.

Final Word

HAI is a serious issue that costs money and lives and causes human suffering. There are many reasons why people develop HAI but the most common cause is poor hand hygiene practice among health professionals.