Tips for Patients

Why clean hands are important – Doctors and nurses care for many sick people each day, often touching patients and their surroundings. While providing this much-needed care, they risk spreading germs to you if they did not clean their hands!

What do we mean by "infections" – An infection you catch while receiving health care, through the transmission of your own or another patient's germs, is called a *health care-associated infection*. They are a major global patient safety concern. Hand hygiene is the simplest, most effective way to reduce the chance of catching these infections. Though cleaning hands in easy, health-care workers might forget or be too busy to do this.

How you can help – Your participation starts by gathering information about this problem and hand hygiene best practices. You and your families may also help remind health-care workers not to touch your skin and critical sites (e.g. your catheters) if their hands have not been cleaned yet.

DID YOU **KNOW ?**   Simply asking or thanking your doctor, nurse, or other health-care workers to clean his or her hands before touching you, can help you avoid a health care-associated infection.

These tips will help you understand how to participate in hand hygiene improvement while receiving care.

There are 4 main things you and/or your family can do:

1. **Ask if an initiative involving patients or a patient participation programme exists.** If yes, ask whether there is a leaflet or information sheet about it and express your interest in participating.
2. **Don't be afraid to ask about hand hygiene practices in the facility.** While health-care workers make every possible effort to provide you with the best care, you have the right to ask for information and to check if best practices are in place. This can significantly help improve health-care delivery.
3. **Observe if alcohol-based handrub dispensers, as well as sinks, soap and towels are available in your room or if health-care workers carry pocket bottles.** If not, gently ask why hand hygiene products are not available and possibly ask for a small bottle of alcohol-based handrub product to keep by your bed.
4. **If hand hygiene products are available, start by thanking your doctor, nurse, or other health-care worker** when you see them cleaning their hands before touching you or any critical site (e.g. catheter, wound dressing, drainage tube).

The following highlights will help you understand the right moment and the right way to remind your doctor, nurse, or other health-care worker about hand hygiene:

WHO?   Doctors, nurses and any other health-care worker (such as technicians and assistants) who touch you. Your relatives and visitors should also clean their hands upon arrival, especially before touching you, and then before leaving too.

WHAT?   When a health-care worker enters the zone/area where you receive care (near your bed, for example), before they touch you or any critical site (e.g. catheter, wound dressing, drainage tube), **you can ask them** to clean their hands with an alcohol-based handrub. Or, you can thank them in advance, as they approach you, as a polite reminder.

WHEN?   The five important times you should remind health-care workers about hand hygiene:

1. Before anyone touches you
2. Before health-care workers perform a clean/aseptic procedure, such as inserting an IV (intravenous catheter)
3. After tasks which might lead to exposure to body fluids, such as emptying your urinary catheter
4. After anyone touches you
5. After anyone touches things in your care area, such as bedrails or your medical chart.

WHERE?   Wherever health care takes place, whether in a hospital, clinic, or doctor's office.

HOW?   Reminding and thanking are positive interactions and your health-care provider will understand your positive intentions to avoid an infection. Keep it simple, and do it often!

- "Thank you for your hand hygiene action."
- "Did you clean your hands?"
- "Did I remind you about hand hygiene?"