The WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care have been developed to encourage health-care workers to decontaminate their hands at the right time and in the correct way. Clean hands can stop many harmful germs spreading and can thus save lives.

The Guidelines encourage partnerships between patients, their families and health-care providers to promote hand hygiene in health care.

What this means in practice may differ from one country to another and from one health-care setting to another. In some countries, for example, patients and their families may be invited to ask staff directly about hand hygiene. In others, relatives and visitors may themselves play an active role in the process of health-care delivery because of cultural norms and/or staff shortages. It is important to make patients and their families aware that better hand hygiene is crucial for safer care.

Some country examples of current initiatives:

In some countries patients and their families are already actively encouraged as part of the health-care team to ask their doctors and nurses:

- “Have you cleaned your hands before examining me?”
- “I’ve noticed that some doctors and nurses clean their hands or wear gloves before touching people - why is that?”
- “Have you cleaned your hands before examining me?”
- “I’ve noticed that some doctors and nurses clean their hands or wear gloves before touching people - why is that?”
- All patients and their families should expect to see staff cleaning their hands.
- The Partners in Your Care Programme empowers patients with responsibility for their care. Patients are active participants in changing staff behaviour by asking all staff who have direct contact with them: “did you clean your hands?”
- In some countries, messages have been tailored around the term “okay to ask”.
- “It’s okay to ask” invites patients to directly ask staff about hand hygiene.

Checklist

Tips for safer hospital care

Purpose of this leaflet

- This leaflet is designed to provide countries and facilities with a brief overview of the role of information and involvement of patients in Clean Care is Safer Care.
- It is also a signpost to existing examples of patient involvement in a number of countries.

What facilities can do:

- Raise awareness of the risks to health when clean care is not attained and explain, in simple terms, to patients and their families, what are health care-associated infections and why they occur.
- Talk about hand hygiene and its role in the battle against health care-associated infections, which can be spread by hands.
- Produce information for patients and their family which highlights the importance of clean hands.

Patient involvement and engagement:

- Staff might want to consider encouraging patients and relatives to point out lapses in hand hygiene technique.
- It is important to consider how such an approach might be implemented as part of a multimodal improvement strategy.
- Facilities may want to assess material available or to be developed which provides information on hand hygiene.
- It is important that patients feel safe when having treatment. Patients should expect to see staff cleaning their hands before they are cared for.
- Patients may be encouraged to be aware and observe whether caregivers have cleaned their hands without asking them directly - this feedback may be sought later by a survey for example.

1 AHRQ Publication No. 01-0040a www.ahrq.gov/consumer/
3 AAOS on line fact sheet: Twelve steps to a safer hospital stay www.orthoinfo.aaos.org
4 JCAHO Speak Up Safety Initiative www.jcaho.org/general+public/gp+speak+up/infection_control_brochure.pdf
5 National Patient Safety Agency: cleanyourhands campaign www.npsa.nhs.uk/cleanyourhands
6 Partners in Your Care www.med.upenn.edu/mcguckin/handwashing/

INFORMATION SHEET 4

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