

Frequently Asked Questions about Hand Hygiene Compliance

What is hand hygiene?

Hand hygiene relates to the removal of visible soil and the removal or killing of transient microorganisms from the hands and may be accomplished using soap and running water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

Why is hand hygiene so important?

Hand hygiene is an important practice for health care providers and has a significant impact on reducing the spread of infections in hospitals. Hand hygiene is a different way of thinking about safety and patient care and involves everyone in the hospital, including patients and health care providers. Effective hand hygiene practices in hospitals play a key role in improving patient and provider safety, and in preventing the spread of health care-associated infections.

What are health care-associated infections?

Sometimes when patients are admitted to the hospital, they can get infections. These are called health care-associated infections.

Why is hand hygiene compliance a publicly reported indicator?

The most common way that healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) are spread in the health care setting is through contaminated hands of health care workers. The hands of the health care worker can easily become contaminated with germs when they come into contact with colonized or infected patients or after handling contaminated material or equipment.

Monitoring hand hygiene practices and the provision of timely feedback are vital to improving compliance and, in turn, reducing HAIs.

What is the definition of hand hygiene compliance?

Four indications define proper hand hygiene compliance:

- 1.** Before initial contact with the patient/patient environment
- 2.** Before aseptic (sterile) procedure
- 3.** After body fluid exposure risk
- 4.** After contact with patient/patient environment.

What is Hotel Dieu Hospital doing to improve patient safety in terms of hand hygiene?

Hotel Dieu has implemented the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's "Just Clean Your Hands" program. This campaign includes senior administration support, staff

education, choosing the right products and proper placement at point of care (where the healthcare provider, patient and care are taking place) and a hand care program. One of the most important parts to the “Just Clean Your Hands” campaign is the auditing of hand hygiene compliance of our staff, which HDH has been doing since October 2008.

What can patients do to help improve their own safety?

Hand hygiene involves everyone in the hospital, including patients. Hand cleaning is one of the best ways you and your health care team can prevent the spread of many infections. Patients and their visitors should also practice good hand hygiene before and after entering patient rooms. More patient-specific information is available at www.ontario.ca/patientsafety and www.oha.com/patientsafetytips.

How will the public reporting of hand hygiene compliance affect compliance among health care professionals?

There are many factors that will improve hand hygiene compliance. Mandatory public reporting is one element. Certainly the increasing recent attention on the issue as well as the provincial government’s multifaceted hand hygiene program called *Just Clean Your Hands* are important to ensuring effective hand hygiene at the right times.