

Hand hygiene

A patient's guide

Why is hand hygiene so important?

Hand hygiene is the single most effective action that can be taken to prevent the spread of infection. It removes most organisms (germs) picked up by the hands and also reduces the numbers that normally live on the skin.

Effective hand hygiene will give protection to you and help to prevent the transfer of germs to other people.

What can staff do?

Staff should know when and how to perform hand hygiene. This includes occasions such as:

- Before and after each patient contact.
- After contact with the patient surroundings.
- Before procedures which involve a sterile field.
- After contact or risk of contact with body fluids.

All clinical staff and other staff members in contact with patients are reminded that wristwatches, jewellery, false nails and clothing that extends below the elbow are not acceptable, as they interfere with effective hand hygiene.

All cuts and abrasions should be covered with a waterproof dressing.

What can patients and visitors do?

As a patient, you can help by:

- Washing your hands after using the bathroom.
- Washing your hands after blowing/wiping your nose, or covering a sneeze or cough.
- Washing or wiping your hands before eating.
- Asking a member of staff for help if you are unable to do this yourself.
- Not touching any operation wounds unless the wounds are thoroughly healed and your hands have been thoroughly washed.

As a visitor, you can help by:

- Washing your hands, or using the alcohol-based hand rub before visiting your relative or friend.
- Washing your hands before handling food and after blowing/wiping your nose, or covering a sneeze or cough.
- Washing your hands after visiting the bathroom.
- Covering all cuts and abrasions with a waterproof dressing.

- If you are required to wear gloves and/or aprons when visiting, you should wash your hands before and after putting these items on. Please discuss with a member of the ward staff.

What products should be used?

Staff should be aware of which products to use.

In most instances, the use of an alcohol-based product is acceptable. It is generally at least as effective as soap and water in removing potentially harmful bacteria that live on the hands, and is much quicker to use if time is short. This is available at every bedside and at various points throughout the wards and departments.

However, there are certain situations when soap and water must be used, eg if a patient has potentially infective diarrhoea, and during outbreaks of Norovirus.

Is there any more information?

Please do not be afraid or embarrassed to ask a member of staff if they have cleaned their hands either with soap and water, or the alcohol-based product. They will not mind being

reminded to do so, and if you have any concerns please speak to someone involved in your care who can address the situation for you.

Please inform a member of staff if supplies of soap, paper towels or the alcohol-based hand rub are low, and we will replenish them for you.

“WE WANT YOU TO FEEL SAFE IN OUR HANDS SO WE CLEAN THEM!”

We hope you can be reassured by the information contained in this leaflet and understand that we are committed to the prevention and control of infection within Papworth Hospital.

Further information

Please do not hesitate to ask a member of the ward staff in the first instance if you have any further questions, or ask to contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team as below.

Clinical Nurse Specialist

Ext. 4685/Bleep 131

Infection Control Nurse

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