



Infection Control: Effective Hand Hygiene and Glove Use

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After reading the newsletter, the home health aide should be able to:

1. Define healthcare-associated infections.
2. Describe proper hand hygiene according to CDC guidelines.
3. Discuss appropriate use to gloves in providing client care.

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) are infections that occur in persons receiving healthcare in any setting, and that were not present or developing before healthcare was provided. Millions of people in the US develop HAIs each year, in hospital, long-term care, ambulatory and home care settings. Every day, one in every 25 hospitalized patients develops a HAI. These infections jeopardize patient health and safety and increase healthcare costs by billions of dollars. Fortunately, many of these HAIs are preventable.



The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that performing effective hand hygiene is the simplest and most effective way to prevent the spread of germs, such as bacteria and viruses, including multi-drug resistant organisms. The Joint Commission calls hand hygiene "the most important intervention for preventing healthcare-associated infections." Not only does effective hand hygiene help to protect patients from infection, it also helps to protect the staff who provide care. But, according to the CDC, healthcare providers clean their hands less than half of the times they should.

This newsletter will discuss effective hand hygiene, including guidelines from the CDC. Appropriate use of gloves to prevent infections will also be covered.

Effective Hand Hygiene

The CDC recommends two effective methods of hand hygiene. The healthcare provider may wash with soap and water, using either plain or anti-microbial soap. Or, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, also called hand rub, can be used to decontaminate hands. Use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is preferred by the CDC over soap and water, except when hands are visibly dirty. This is because alcohol-based hand rubs are more effective in reducing the number of germs on the hands than washing with soap and water. Some people are reluctant to use hand rubs, thinking that they are more drying or irritating to the skin. However, the CDC states that hand rubs containing emollients are more gentle to the skin than washing with soap and water.



Hand hygiene should be performed in the following situations:

- before and after touching a client
- after touching surfaces or objects in the client's environment
- before moving from a contaminated body site to a clean body site in client care (such as removing gloves and washing hands after contact with the genitals or an infected wound, before giving mouth care)
- after contact with body fluids, excretions, mucous membranes or

dressings (note: follow guidelines for Standard Precautions by always wearing gloves when this type of contact is anticipated)

- after removing gloves
- before eating
- after using the bathroom

The CDC recommends that hands be washed with soap (either anti-microbial or plain) and water whenever hands are visibly dirty, as well as before eating and after using the bathroom. Soap and water should also be used if possible exposure to *C. diff* bacteria has occurred, when caring for patients with diarrhea due to possible norovirus, and after possible exposure to patients with anthrax. In all other situations, an alcohol-based hand rub should be used to decontaminate hands.



To wash hands effectively using soap and water, use the following steps:

Wet: The hands should be thoroughly wet first, avoiding use of hot water, as it can be drying to the skin.

Lather: Apply the recommended amount of soap, and rub to lather the hands thoroughly, including the backs of hands, between the fingers and under the nails.

Scrub: Rub each hand vigorously with the other for at least 15-20 seconds, or long enough to sing the Happy Birthday song twice. Make sure to scrub the backs of hands, between the fingers and under the nails. Keep clothing away from the sink edges to avoid contamination.

Rinse: Rinse hands well under running water. But don't turn off the faucet yet!

Dry: Dry hands thoroughly using a disposable towel. Use the towel to turn off the water before disposing of it.

When using an alcohol-based hand rub, follow the manufacturer's directions. Dispense the recommended amount of product into the palm of one hand and spread it over all skin surfaces. Rub vigorously until hands are dry, about 20 seconds—do not wipe gel off.

Use of Gloves

Gloves help to reduce the spread of infection by serving as a protective barrier between the client and the hands of the caregiver. The types of gloves most commonly used for everyday client care activities are non-sterile, disposable gloves made of nitrile, vinyl, latex or other material.

Gloves should be worn by healthcare providers whenever contact with blood, body fluids, mucous

membranes, or broken skin, such as wounds, may occur. Examples of situations requiring use of non-sterile gloves include providing mouth or perineal care, cleaning urine or stool from a client, emptying bedpans or emesis basins, changing linens contaminated by body fluids/waste, and caring for a client on contact precautions. Except for clients on contact precautions, gloves are not usually required for activities such as measuring blood pressure, pulse and temperature, changing linens that are not contaminated with body fluids/waste, and bathing (except perineal area) and dressing clients.

Guidelines published by the World Health Organization (WHO) for use of clean (non-sterile) gloves include the following: Hands should be thoroughly dry from washing or hand rubs before applying gloves, to reduce skin irritation. Apply gloves by picking up one glove at the wrist and pulling it onto the opposite hand. With the gloved hand, pick up the second glove by the wrist, and pull it onto the other hand, keeping the fingers on the outer surface of the glove's wrist to avoid contact with the skin on the forearm.

Gloves should be removed after contact with the client or equipment, surfaces or objects in the client's environment. Remove gloves by pulling the outside of one glove at the wrist, peeling it off inside out without touching the forearm skin. The gloved hand is now holding the removed glove. The second glove is removed by sliding the bare hand between the glove and skin and pushing the glove off the hand and over the first glove. The gloves can now be discarded into a waste receptacle, followed by hand hygiene.

Gloves should not be washed, as this can create tiny holes that allow germs to enter. Also, disposable gloves should never be re-used. Avoid touching your face or areas of your body while wearing gloves. Also, do not touch objects or surfaces in the environment, except when necessary.

And remember, wearing gloves does not substitute for performing hand hygiene. It is very important to perform hand hygiene before and after glove use, since gloves may have tiny holes that allow germs to pass through, or hands may be contaminated by touching glove surfaces when the gloves are removed.

The transmission of organisms that can cause HAIs is a very serious concern in healthcare settings. Use of proper hand hygiene and Standard Precautions can help to greatly decrease this risk, as well as protect the safety of the healthcare provider.





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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

- ___ 1. A healthcare-associated infection is best defined as an infection that occurs:
- A. only in hospitals
 - B. when a person is already sick
 - C. in persons with weakened immune systems
 - D. in persons receiving healthcare
- ___ 2. The CDC states that the most effective way to prevent the spread of germs is by:
- A. cleaning hands thoroughly
 - B. wearing gloves at all times
 - C. not using items that were dropped on the floor
 - D. disinfecting equipment before use
- ___ 3. The CDC estimates that how many healthcare providers perform hand hygiene when they should?
- A. almost all
 - B. about 3/4
 - C. less than half
 - D. none
- ___ 4. Which of the following hand hygiene methods is most effective in reducing the number of germs on the hands?
- A. anti-microbial soap and water
 - B. plain soap and water
 - C. chlorine-based hand sanitizer
 - D. alcohol-based hand sanitizer

- ____ 5. Which of the following hand hygiene methods is the most gentle to the skin on the hands?
- A. alcohol-based hand sanitizer with emollients
 - B. anti-microbial soap and water
 - C. plain soap and water
 - D. all of the above are equally gentle to skin
- ____ 6. The CDC recommends that soap and water, rather than a hand rub, be used to clean hands in which of the following situations?
- A. before touching a client
 - B. before moving from a contaminated to clean body site
 - C. after using the bathroom
 - D. after touching objects in the client's environment
- ____ 7. When washing with soap and water, the CDC recommends that hands be rubbed together vigorously for at least:
- A. 5 seconds
 - B. 15-20 seconds
 - C. 30-45 seconds
 - D. 1 minute
- ____ 8. When using a hand rub, any gel remaining after rubbing hands together should be wiped off with a paper towel.
- A. True
 - B. False
- ____ 9. The HHA performs the following actions when using gloves. Which action is NOT safe?
- A. washes hands before and after glove use
 - B. removes second glove by inserting hand between glove and skin
 - C. washes gloved hands and continues giving care
 - D. wears gloves whenever contact with blood or body fluids may occur
- ____ 10. After using disposable gloves to care for a client, the gloves can safely be removed and saved for use again on that client.
- A. True
 - B. False

