



Patient & Family Guide
2025

Hand Hygiene

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www.nshealth.ca

Hand Hygiene

Germs are everywhere. They live in us, on us, and around us. We pick up germs every time we touch an object. Many germs are harmless, normal, and good for our health.

Some germs may be harmful. When your hands are not clean, they carry many germs and can spread sickness from person to person. These germs can easily be removed with good hand hygiene (cleaning your hands).

We are all responsible for preventing the spread of germs in health care settings (like hospitals and long-term care facilities). **Hand hygiene is the best way to stop the spread of germs in health care settings, the community, and at home.**

Hand hygiene methods include:

- › cleaning your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub. Look for hand-rub dispensers throughout health care settings.
- › washing your hands with soap and water.



It is important to keep your hands clean.

- Clean your hands often while you are in any health care setting. This includes:
 - › After using the washroom or a commode chair, bedpan, or urinal
 - › Before eating
 - › After coughing or sneezing, or blowing your nose
 - › After touching things many other people have touched (like a doorknob)
 - › Before taking pills, eye drops, inhalers, injections, etc.
 - › Before entering and leaving your room

Before cleaning your hands, take off any jewelry. Make sure your hands are completely dry before you touch anything.

- Essential care providers and visitors must always clean their hands:
 - › when they arrive for a visit.
 - › before helping you eat or handling your meal tray.
 - › before and after helping with your care.
 - › when they leave your room.

Using alcohol-based hand rub

- Use alcohol-based hand rub when you cannot see dirt on your hands and they do not feel dirty or sticky.
- These products are safe and will not dry or damage your skin.
- If your hands look dirty or you have just used the washroom, wash your hands with soap and water.

Ask your health care provider for hand hygiene supplies if you run out at any time.

To use alcohol-based hand rub:

1. Use 1 to 2 pumps from the dispenser.
2. Cover all parts of your hands.
3. Rub your hands together until they are dry, about 15 to 30 seconds.
4. Only touch other surfaces once your hands are completely dry.



To wash with soap and water:

1. Wet your hands with warm running water. Leave the water running.
2. Apply soap (liquid soap is best). Work up a soapy lather by rubbing your hands together. Rub your palms, the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and your wrists for at least 15 seconds. The whole process should take 40 to 60 seconds.
3. Rinse well with warm running water.
4. Leave the water running and dry your hands completely.
5. Use a towel or your elbow to turn off the water. **Do not touch the taps with your clean hands.**



Ask, “Did you clean your hands?”

You are a partner in your care. Before doctors, nurses, and other staff have any direct physical contact with you, it is OK to ask, “Did you clean your hands?”. This will remind them how important it is to have clean hands.

Health care providers need to clean their hands:

- before contact with a patient or their environment (before they touch you or anything near you, like your bed).
- before doing a procedure (like starting an I.V., changing a dressing, or taking a blood sample).
- after contact with body fluid (they should clean their hands before putting on gloves and after taking them off).
- after contact with a patient or their environment (once they are finished caring for you, and leave your bedside).

Health care providers appreciate reminders because they all know how important clean hands are to good health.

Good health care starts with good communication.

Hand Hygiene Reports are publicly reported in Nova Scotia. To see these reports visit:

- › <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/hsq/public-reporting/hand-hygiene-data.asp>



This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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