



Patient & Family Guide  
2017

# Hand Hygiene for Patients, Residents & Clients

Aussi disponible en français : *L'hygiène des mains pour les patients, les résidents et les clients* (FF85-1781)



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

## Why all the fuss about clean hands?

Germs are everywhere. Germs are picked up every time we touch any object. They live around us, in us, and on our skin. Many are harmless, normal, and good for our health.

Some germs may be harmful. Unclean hands carry many germs and can spread sickness from person to person. The good news is these germs are easily removed with good hand hygiene (i.e. cleaning your hands).

Health care providers, patients, residents, clients, friends and visitors and anyone who is cared for in or visits health care settings such as hospitals or long-term care facilities, has a role to play in preventing infections. It begins with clean hands. **Hand hygiene is the number one way to stop the spread of germs in health care settings, the community, and at home.**

### Hand hygiene methods include:

- Cleaning hands with an alcohol-based hand rub – look for dispensers throughout health care settings
- Washing with soap and water



## **Clean hands are important**

- Clean your hands often while you are in any health care setting. This includes:
  - › After trips to the washroom or after using 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 door knob
  - › Before taking pills, eye drops, inhalers, injections etc.
  - › Before entering and leaving your room

**Before washing your hands, take off any jewelry. After cleaning, make sure your hands are completely dry before you touch anything.**

- Visitors must always clean their hands:
  - › When they first 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

- These products are used when you cannot see anything on your hands. These products are safe and will not dry or damage your skin.
- If your hands look dirty or if you have just used the bathroom, wash your hands with soap and water. Ask your health care provider for hand hygiene supplies if you run out at any time during your stay.

1. Alcohol-based hand rub is the preferred way to clean your hands.
2. Use 1-2 pumps from the dispenser and cover all parts of your hands with it.
3. Rub your hands together until they are dry, about 20-30 seconds. Once they are completely dry it's OK to touch other surfaces.



## Handwashing 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 using friction and rub your palms, back of hands, between the fingers, and wrists for 40-60 seconds.
3. Rinse well with the 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. Don't 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 them, “Did you clean your hands?” This will remind them of the importance of clean hands.

### **Health care providers need to clean their hands:**

- Before patient contact or contact with the patient’s environment (before they touch you or anything near you, such as your bed).
- Before doing a procedure, such as starting an IV, changing a dressing, or taking a blood sample.
- After contact with body fluid (staff should clean their hands before putting on gloves and after taking them off).
- After patient contact or contact with the patient’s 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.**

Audit results are reported publicly.  
Nova Scotia Hand Hygiene Reports:  
<https://novascotia.ca/dhw/hsq/public-reporting/hand-hygiene-data.asp>

**Looking for more health information?**

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

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If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

WC85-1036 Updated September 2017

The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.