

The importance of hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is the most important method of preventing and controlling the spread of infections.

It is extremely important that all patients and visitors have clean hands.

There are two main ways to decontaminate your hands: either washing them with soap and fresh running water or using a hand sanitiser.

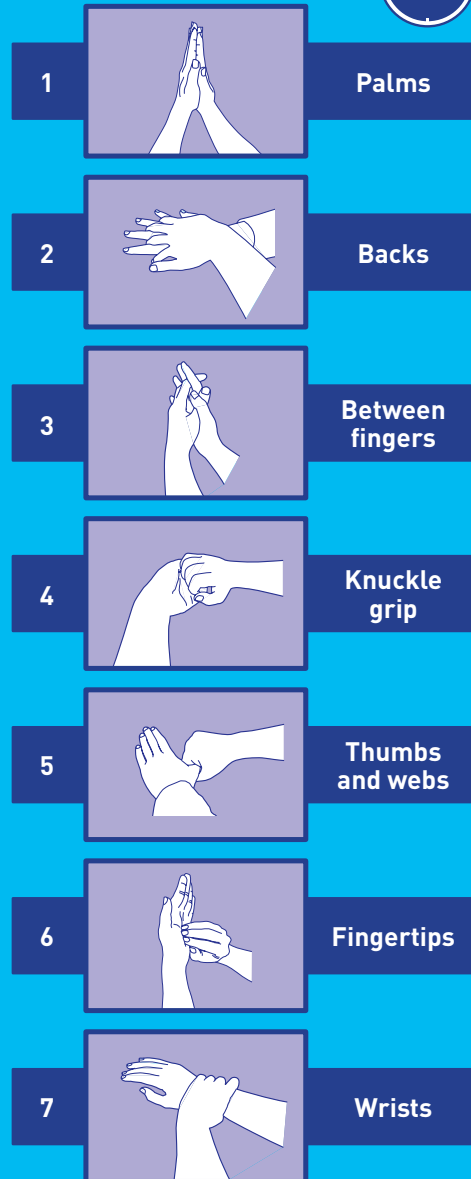
How patients and visitors can help prevent the spread of infections

Patients – always wash your hands after using bathroom or toilet facilities, before eating food, after coughing or sneezing into the hands, or when your hands are visibly dirty. Hand wipes may also be useful to clean your hands.

Visitors – protect yourself and patients in hospitals and care homes by washing your hands when entering and leaving the ward or by using the liquid or foam hand sanitisers.

Hand hygiene technique

It takes less than a minute!



Washing your hands with liquid soap and water

- Wet hands under running water and apply liquid soap.
- Rub hands together, ensuring all areas are covered – this can be achieved by following the 7-step diagram as illustrated.
- Dry hands thoroughly using a disposable paper towel.
- Dispose of used paper towel in appropriate waste bin – waste bins in hospitals and care homes will be foot operated pedal bins – this will prevent recontamination of your hands by lifting the lid of the bin.

Using a liquid or foam hand sanitiser

- Apply hand sanitiser to dry hands.
- Rub hands together, ensuring all areas are covered – follow the 7-step diagram as illustrated.
- Allow hand sanitiser to dry on your hands.

When can I not use hand sanitisers?

It is not appropriate to use a hand sanitiser when the hands are visibly dirty or soiled. You should use running water and liquid soap in this instance.

Many hand sanitisers are not effective against viral infections eg vomiting and diarrhoea caused by norovirus, or when someone has *clostridium difficile* infection (infectious diarrhoea). You should use running water and liquid soap in this instance.

Hospital or care home staff will be happy to advise you when it is appropriate to use hand sanitisers or soap and water.

Remember it's OK to ask!

As a patient in a hospital or a resident in a care home, you should expect to see staff clean their hands before and after they provide care to you, but if you think staff have forgotten **it's OK to ask!**

If you require further advice or information, please contact the hospital's Infection Prevention and Control Team or a member of the ward/care home staff.

Infection prevention and control is everyone's responsibility.

Patients and visitors all have an important role to play in preventing the spread of healthcare associated infections.

Hand hygiene

Information leaflet for patients and visitors