

Hand Hygiene: The Basics

Introduction

About This Course

Every day you encounter a number of harmful germs capable of making you and others in your environment sick. So how do you protect yourself and others from these harmful germs? By following proper infection control practices. Hand hygiene is the single most important infection control measure to prevent the spread of germs. In this course, you will learn when hand hygiene is necessary as well as the correct procedure for hand washing and the use of alcohol-based hand rubs.

Learning Objectives

After taking this course, you should be able to:

- Identify situations in which hand hygiene is necessary.
- Demonstrate the correct procedure for hand washing and the use of an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR).

Hand Hygiene

When to Perform

The information provided in this course follows the most recent hand hygiene guidelines published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2002) unless otherwise stated. However, your employer may have hand hygiene policies that differ from the guidelines presented in this course, so it is important for you to be familiar with your employer's policies.

Hand hygiene is a general term that describes hand washing using soap and water **or** the use of an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) to destroy harmful pathogens, such as bacteria or viruses, on the hands.

You should always perform hand hygiene:

- When you arrive for work and when you leave for the day
- Before touching your mouth, nose, or eyes
- Before applying and after removing personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves)
- Before and after providing any type of care
- After contact with intact skin
- After contact with medical equipment or other environmental surfaces that may be contaminated

You **must** perform hand hygiene (hand washing or the use of an ABHR) after contact with bodily fluids, such as urine or blood, mucous membranes, such as the mouth or nose, and non-intact skin. However, if your hands are visibly dirty or contaminated with blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM), you must always wash your hands with soap and water. If a sink is not close by, you may decontaminate your hands with an ABHR, but you must wash them with soap and water as soon as possible.

Course Title

In addition, you must wash your hands:

- Before eating, preparing, handling, or serving food
- After using the restroom or assisting another person with using the restroom, including changing a baby's diaper
- After providing care to a person with infectious diarrhea, including norovirus, salmonella, shigella, and C. difficile

Hand Washing

In order to be effective, you must follow the proper procedure when washing your hands. First, check that you have enough soap and disposable towels.

Next, turn on the faucet and make sure the water temperature is warm. Keep the water running so you do not contaminate your hands by repeatedly turning the faucet on and off.

Stand back from the sink so you do not contaminate your clothing by splashing water or by touching the side of the sink. Wet your hands thoroughly.

Apply an appropriate amount of soap, as recommended by the manufacturer, to your hands. Lather the soap over the top and bottoms of your hands, fingers, and wrists using quick motions.

Interlace your fingers to clean between them. Clean your fingernails by rubbing them against the palm of your other hand to force soap under the nails.

According to the CDC, you should continue to lather the soap over all surfaces of the hands and fingers for at least 15 – 20 seconds. Per the CDC, either time is acceptable. The primary focus should be on performing hand hygiene at the appropriate times (CDC, 2019). Your employer's policy may specify a longer time for hand washing, so make sure you are familiar with your employer's specific policy.

Rinse your hands well under running water keeping your fingertips pointed downward. Do not shake the water from your hands.

Dry your hands thoroughly with a clean disposable towel. Drop the towel in a trashcan without touching the container. Then use a clean, dry disposable towel to turn off the faucet. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2009), the entire hand washing process should take 40-60 seconds to complete.

Use of ABHRs

You can use alcohol-based hand rubs (ABHRs) for the routine decontamination of hands except in the circumstances in which washing hands with soap and water is required. You cannot use ABHRs if working in a food service setting.

As with hand washing, it is important for you to follow the proper procedure when using ABHRs. First, make sure that the product you are using is approved by your organization. Some hand rubs on the market are not alcohol-based and therefore should not be used.

Apply the appropriate amount of product, as recommended by the manufacturer, to the palm of one hand then spread the product by rubbing your hands together until your hands are dry. As with hand washing, make sure to cover all surfaces of the hands and fingers including between the fingers.

Course Title

Review

Introduction: Identify the appropriate hand hygiene guidelines by dragging the correct guidelines to the sink and the incorrect guidelines to the trashcan.

Correct guidelines:

- Lather your hands for at least 15 seconds.
- Wash your hands when visibly soiled or contaminated.
- Turn the faucet off with a clean, dry disposable towel.

Incorrect guidelines:

- Use an ABHR prior to serving food.
- Turn the faucet off after wetting your hands.
- Stand against the rim of the sink to keep your clothing dry.

Course Title

Conclusion

Summary

Now that you have finished reviewing the course content, you should have learned the following:

Because hand hygiene is the most important infection control measure, it is imperative for you to understand when you must perform hand hygiene and the guidelines for proper hand washing and the use of alcohol-based hand rubs. By following the guidelines outlined in this course and your employer's policies and procedures, you can prevent the spread of germs.

Course Contributors

Jennifer Moore, RN has worked in the senior care industry for the past 14 years. She has held positions including MDS Coordinator, Director of Nursing, Medicare Nurse Coordinator, Nurse Consultant, Area Manager, and Director of Quality Assurance. Her overall responsibility within each of these positions was to ensure residents received the highest quality of care. This included active participation in quality improvement initiatives, review of clinical records to identify areas of weakness, corroboration with the medical director to institute policies and procedures for resident care, and staff education/training. Additionally, she was responsible for maintaining an effective compliance program under a Quality of Care Corporate Integrity Agreement with the Office of Inspector General for a period of five years. She currently serves as a content developer for Relias Learning. Within this position, her responsibility is to develop and review online training modules for the senior care industry. She has served as the subject matter expert for courses on re-hospitalization, clinical skill reviews, and various OSHA and regulatory compliance topics. In addition, she has presented at various state conferences on mandatory compliance, quality assessment and assurance (QA&A), and quality assessment and performance improvement (QAPI).

References

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