



# Infection Control Tips on Handwashing

- Handwashing is the single most important procedure for preventing healthcare acquired infections.
- Just from contact with body secretions, health-care workers' hands can carry bacteria, viruses, and fungi that may be potentially infectious to themselves and others.
- Handwashing is recommended when there is prolonged and intense contact with any patient.
- Handwashing is necessary **before** and **after** situations in which hands are likely to become contaminated, especially when hands have had contact with mucous membranes, blood and body fluids, and secretions or excretions, and **after** touching contaminated items such as urine-measuring devices. As a general rule, when in doubt health-care workers should wash their hands.
- The generally accepted correct handwashing time and method is a 15-second vigorous rubbing together of all lathered surfaces followed by rinsing in a flowing stream of water. If hands are visibly soiled, more time may be required.
- The choice of plain or antiseptic soap, or of alcohol-based hand rinses should depend on whether it is important to reduce and maintain minimal counts of colonizing flora as well as to mechanically remove the contaminating flora. Consult your infection control department if you have a question as to whether you should use an antimicrobial soap.
- Even if gloves are worn, handwashing is still extremely important when gloves are removed. Gloves may become perforated and bacteria can multiply rapidly on gloved hands.

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