FIVE EASY STEPS TO HAND HYGIENE!

Since you deal with many different clients everyday, it is extremely important to keep your hands clean.

Even by touching a doorknob or a cell phone, you can pick up and pass on thousands of different germs. Here are the five suggested steps to follow to properly wash your hands, whether you are at home or at the workplace.

1. **WATER AND SUDS**: Begin by wetting each hand thoroughly. Use an antibacterial soap. It can be in either a liquid form or a bar of soap. If using a bar of soap, make sure that it is placed on a clean rack when you are finished. All water will drain off the soap and keep it free from germs.

2. **RUB**: Once you have applied soap, rub your hands together making sure you don’t miss any spots. Scrub all surfaces, including in between each finger.

3. **TAKE YOUR TIME**: Resume scrubbing each hand for at least 15 seconds (but 30 is better). Do not rub so hard that your skin becomes irritated, as this can lead to certain skin conditions.

4. **RINSE**: Rinse both hands well in warm, but not scalding, water. There are studies proving that very warm water can do a lot of harm to your skin, and even add to infection!

5. **DRY**: Dry hands thoroughly. As paper or cloth towels work, the best way to dry is by using a motion activated dryer. These dryers are touch free, which means less infection!

WHAT ABOUT WATERLESS HAND CLEANERS?

Waterless hand sanitizers can eliminate many of the problems that healthcare workers face when taking care of patients.

- Alcohol-based hand rubs are faster because you can rub your hands while you are moving between patients.
- Hand rubs are gentler and do not cause the irritation, drying and cracking you find with hand soaps.
- **To use**: Place a small amount in the palm of one hand. Rub hands together, being sure to cover all surfaces of hands and fingers. Rub until hands are dry.
- Only use waterless hand rubs when hands are not visibly soiled. If hands are visibly soiled always wash with soap and water.

“GEL IN, WASH OUT!” Clean your hands both before and after client care by using the “Gel In, Wash Out” method. Use waterless hand cleaner before client care, then wash with soap and water when you are done!

THINK ABOUT IT!

When should you wash your hands?

Here are a few times when it is absolutely necessary to wash your hands:

- Before and after ANY contact with a client.
- Before and after you use the bathroom or eat.
- After touching contaminated items such as urine measuring devices.
- Before putting on, and after taking off gloves.
- Any time a client asks you to wash your hands.
- Whenever you are preparing food for a client.
- After sneezing or coughing, even if you used a tissue.

Think of at least three more situations when you absolutely must wash your hands.

*Share your answers with your supervisor and co-workers!*
ALL ABOUT GLOVES!

You should always wear gloves whenever you are likely to come into contact with any bodily fluids, blood, mucous membranes, contaminated materials, or broken skin.

For these reasons, gloves are essential. But, are they harmful as well?

- No glove, no matter how tough, is completely resistant to infectious diseases.
- Gloves can protect the wearer, but what about the client? Microorganisms can still be passed from the outside of the glove to the client!
- Wearing gloves constantly can irritate your hands and possibly lead to dermatitis.

That’s why it’s important to know:

- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) advocates proper hand washing at all times . . . even after removing gloves!
- Gloves and waterless hand sanitizers should never take the place of proper hand washing. While these types of preventive measures are important, they are only meant to aid infection control. Hand washing still remains in first place.

CAN YOU BECOME ALLERGIC TO GLOVES?

Latex allergies develop over time with repeated or prolonged exposure. So, while you may not have been allergic to latex in the past, there is a chance you could develop a latex allergy in the future.

Latex contains certain proteins that cause allergic reactions. At least 10 different proteins have been linked to allergic reactions.

Other chemicals in gloves, known as accelerators and antioxidants may also cause allergic reactions.

- Typical allergic reactions to latex include itching, hives, swelling, and runny nose.
- More serious symptoms may involve wheezing, difficulty breathing, nausea, heart palpitations, decreased blood pressure and anaphylactic shock.

Ask your supervisor for latex free gloves if you are experiencing a latex allergy.

Latex free gloves may also be called vinyl, nitrile rubber or neoprene gloves.
KEEPING HANDS GERM FREE

A surprising statistic from The Association for Professional Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) states that regular hand washing for general patient care only occurs about half the time. To make things worse, the healthcare workers that DO wash their hands, don’t do a good enough job!

• According to the Chicago Tribune, the yearly deaths due to germs from unclean hands in hospitals are higher than deaths due to fire, drowning, and car accidents combined!

• Most of the germs on your hands are hiding under and around your fingernails. Be sure to scrub your nails well when you wash your hands.

• Keep nails short and natural. Long (artificial and natural) nails have been blamed for numerous outbreaks of infectious diseases around the country.

• Artificial nails are difficult to clean with proper hand washing. It’s best to avoid them if you are providing patient care.

• Freshly applied nail polish has not been shown to increase germs on fingernails. However, chipped or flaking nail polish CAN harbor dangerous germs.

• Jewelry on your fingers and wrists can serve as a nest for germs. Think about leaving your rings at home and sliding your watch above your wrist when you wash your hands.

PROTECTING YOUR SKIN

Germs on your hands are not just harmful to your clients. They can make you sick, as well! Any break in the skin on your hands can serve as an “on-ramp” for germs to enter YOUR body. Protect the skin on your hands by following these suggestions:

• Wash your hands under water that is at least 110 degrees F. It’s important to keep the water hot enough to remove bacteria, but cool enough not to cause any damage to your hands. A tip for water temperature is to turn it as hot as you can stand and still be comfortable.

• Rinse all the soap off your hands. The water will carry away the germs that you have loosened by rubbing your hands together and rinsing will keep your hands from drying out and cracking.

• Harsh soaps, detergents, chemicals, and not completely drying your hands can lead to dermatitis. Read more about the dangers associated with dermatitis on page 7.
A WORD ABOUT DERMATITIS

Dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin and can be a very frustrating condition for healthcare workers. It is a chronic disease, but is not contagious (cannot be passed from one person to another). The cause of dermatitis is not known, but the disease seems to result from a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

- Eczema, one type of dermatitis, occurs when an irritating material comes in contact with the skin. For hospital workers, this material is often the latex in gloves! Excessive hand washing and chemicals can also irritate the skin and cause dermatitis to worsen.
- According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, skin injuries and illnesses (including dermatitis) make up a huge amount of all occupational injuries and illnesses!

The symptoms of dermatitis include:

- Persistently itchy, red, swollen skin
- Tender, hot, or painful skin
- Dry, scaly, sensitive skin
- Blistered and/or crusty skin

If dermatitis remains untreated, the skin could become thicker and/or a darker color. And, as dermatitis heals, the skin may begin to flake and/or scale. Sometimes this healing process is confused with dry skin.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT DERMATITIS?

Even though dermatitis is sometimes hard to avoid, there are a few things you can do to prevent it:

- Use mild antibacterial soaps.
- Rinse hands thoroughly and do not leave any excess soap residue.
- Dry hands completely after hand washing.
- Apply moisturizers to your hands frequently. Keeping your skin healthy and moisturized is one of the key ways to prevent dermatitis.
- If you feel you are developing an allergy to latex, be sure to talk to your supervisor right away about an alternate type of glove.