



PATIENT INFORMATION

The Facts about Hand Hygiene

Introduction

Hand washing is a simple procedure that we all think we know how to do, and were probably taught as young children. Research shows that this is not the case. If hand washing is performed correctly, it contributes more than any other single action in controlling infection.

Why do we need to wash our hands?

Our hands are frequently contaminated throughout the day with germs, which cannot be seen with the naked eye. Our hands may appear clean but the germs will be there! There are two categories of germs that are carried out on our hands:

- **Resident** – these are deep within the skin and are part of our body's natural defences.
- **Transient** – these are on the surface of our skin and are transferred easily to other people and objects.

How should we wash our hands?

- Wet hands thoroughly before applying soap.
- Apply soap.
- Vigorously massage surfaces of both hands, ensuring a good lather.
- Pay particular attention to the fingertips, thumbs and between the fingers as these are areas that are frequently missed.
- If you wear rings it is important that you move them and wash underneath.
- Rinse hands thoroughly ensuring that you remove all soap, as if not completely rinsed off, your hands can become sore.
- Dry hands thoroughly as damp hands encourage germs to survive
- After using the toilet.
- Before eating or handling food.
- When hands are visibly dirty or contaminated.

When should healthcare workers wash their hands?

Staff working for Torbay and South Devon Healthcare Trust are encouraged to wash their hands or use alcohol hand gel between each patient contact.

They **must** wash their hands:

- When arriving on duty and before leaving the ward or department.
- After toileting others.
- Before and after aseptic procedures i.e. changing dressings, examining wounds, changing bags of infusion (drip) fluids.
- Before handling food, drink and medicines.
- After carrying out any potentially infective procedures.
- After removing gloves.
- When hands are visibly contaminated.

If you notice that a member of staff has not washed their hands or used alcohol hand gel please do not be afraid to ask them to do so.

If you require further advice after reading this leaflet please contact the Infection Control Support Department on ☎ (01803) 655757 and ask to speak to one of the Infection Control Nurses.

References:

Torbay and South Devon Healthcare Trust “Hand Decontamination Policy” - 2010

“Five moments for Hand Hygiene” – Clean your Hands Campaign – NPSA - 2010