

# Partners in Quality Care

## Entering the New Year with a timeless Infection Control Practice: Hand washing

What you will learn:

- The purpose of hand washing
- The technique for proper hand washing
- How hand washing prevents the spread of disease

Hygiene refers to practices associated with ensuring good health and cleanliness.

In-home aides play a vital role in preventing the spread of disease by learning and practicing proper hand washing and by teaching their client's the importance of proper hand washing.

The main purpose of washing hands is to cleanse the hands of pathogens (including bacteria or viruses) and chemicals which can cause personal harm or disease. This is especially important for people who handle food or work in the medical field. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated: "It is well-documented that the most important measure for preventing the spread of pathogens is effective hand washing".

Infections are diseases that are caused by bacteria or viruses and are invisible to the human eye. Infections spread when the bacteria and viruses are carried from one site or person to another.

When we have bacteria or viruses on our hands, we can spread them to ourselves or to others that we touch with our hands, this makes hand washing the most important way to prevent spreading infections.

### Infectious diseases spread through two types of contact

#### **Direct contact**

An easy way to catch most infectious diseases is by coming in contact with someone who has one. This "someone" can be a person, an animal or, for an unborn baby, its mother.

#### **Indirect contact**

Disease-causing organisms can also be passed along by indirect contact. Many germs can linger on an inanimate object, such as a tabletop, doorknob or faucet handle. When you touch the same doorknob grasped by someone ill with the flu or a cold, for example, you can pick up the germs he or she left behind.

### A simple way to stay healthy

**Hand washing doesn't take much time or effort, but it offers great rewards in terms of preventing illness. Adopting this simple habit can play a major role in protecting your health.**



Help keep yourself and your client's healthy with good hand washing



Association for  
**Home & Hospice Care**  
of North Carolina

*In-Home Aides Partners in Quality Care* is a monthly newsletter published for members.  
© Copyright AHHC 2011 - May be reproduced for in-home aides.

Kathie Smith, RN: Director of Quality Initiatives and State Liaison; Editor in Chief  
Marie Epps: Communication Associate; Publication Designer



- **Tip for in home aides:** Bring agency approved hand soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizers with you to each patient's home. Many homes will not be able to supply these items. Never wash your hands with the patient's bar soap or dry hands on the patient's towels hanging in the kitchen or bathroom. These may be dirty or possibly could have been hanging for several days.

## The dangers of not washing your hands

**Despite the proven health benefits of hand washing, many people don't practice this habit as often as they should** — even after using the toilet. Throughout the day you accumulate germs on your hands from a variety of sources, such as direct contact with people, contaminated surfaces, foods, even animals and animal waste. If you don't wash your hands frequently enough, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. And you can spread these germs to others by touching them or by touching surfaces that they also touch, such as doorknobs.

**Infectious diseases that are commonly spread through hand-to-hand contact include the common cold, flu and several gastrointestinal disorders, such as infectious diarrhea. While most people will get over a cold, the flu can be much more serious. Some people with the flu, particularly older adults and people with chronic medical problems, can develop pneumonia. The combination of the flu and pneumonia, in fact, is the eighth-leading cause of death among Americans.**

Inadequate hand hygiene also contributes to food-related illnesses, such as salmonella and E. coli infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as many as 76 million Americans get a food-borne illness each year. Of these, about 5,000 die as a result of their illness. Others experience the annoying signs and symptoms of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

## When to wash:

- When hands are visibly dirty or soiled, wash hands with soap and water.
- If hands are not visibly dirty or soiled, it is ok to use an alcohol-based hand rub for routinely cleaning hands in other situations. Best practice is always hand washing.
- Hand hygiene, hand washing, or using an alcohol-based hand rub, should be done at all of the following times:
  - Before your work begins
  - Before putting on sterile gloves for any task
  - Before and after contact with a person's skin (taking a pulse or blood pressure, lifting, etc.)
  - After contact with body fluids or excretions, mucous membranes, broken skin, or wounds dressings.
  - If moving from a contaminated body site to a clean body site.
  - After contact with contaminated items or environments.
  - After removing gloves.
  - Wash hands with soap and water before eating and after using a restroom.
  - After coughing, sneezing, or blowing ones nose.
  - After contact with soiled linen.
  - Before leaving the facility or person's house at the end of the shift.

## Proper Hand washing steps:

- Wet hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap or use clean bar soap. Lather well.
- Rub hands vigorously together for at least 15 – 20 seconds.
- Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of hands, wrists, between fingers, and under fingernails. Clean under fingernails by rubbing fingertips against palms of the opposite hand.
- Rinse well, keeping hands lower than the elbows and fingertips down.
- Dry all surfaces of hands, wrists, or fingers with a clean or disposable towel.
- Use a towel to turn off the faucet, then dispose of towel in waste container

Resources- Wikipedia; Marrelli- Home Health Aide Guidelines for Care, second edition; Mayo clinic.com; Caring Connection- Infection Control July 2010, Michelle White.

**In-home aide newsletter- January 2011**  
**POST-TEST on Hand washing**

1) Infections are diseases that are caused by bacteria or viruses and are invisible to the human eye (circle true or false)

True

False

2) Throughout the day you accumulate germs on your hands from a variety of sources such as: (circle the correct answer or answers)

- a) Direct contact with people
- b) Contaminated surfaces
- c) foods
- d) animals and animal waste
- e) all of the above

3) The most important measure for preventing the spread of pathogens such as bacteria or viruses is to avoid crowded places (circle true or false)

True

False

4) Disease causing organisms can be passed by indirect contact through the following objects: (circle the correct answer or answers)

- a) a tabletop
- b) doorknob
- c) faucet handle
- d) All of the above

5) When hands are visibly dirty or soiled, you should wash hands with soap and water instead of using hand sanitizer alone. (circle true or false)

True

False

6) Infectious disease spread through direct and indirect contact (circle true or false)

True

False

7) \_\_\_\_\_ doesn't take much time or effort, but it offers great rewards in terms of preventing illness  
(fill in the blank)

8) Proper hand-washing techniques involve: (circle the correct answer or answers):

- a) wet your hands with warm, running water and apply soap, lather well
- b) rub your hands vigorously together for one to two seconds
- c) scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails
- d) rinse well
- e) dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel and use a towel to turn off the faucet
- f) all of the above

9) People with the flu would not be at risk to develop pneumonia: (circle true or false)

True

False

10) Infectious diseases that are commonly spread through hand to hand contact include the:

---