

# Hand hygiene – ten little fingers and how many bugs?

Kate Ryan

Hand Hygiene Australia Project Coordinator



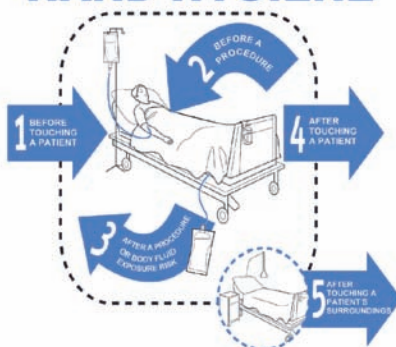
Do you ever stop to think about what might be on your hands? What did you touch after that last patient – yourself, your equipment, your next patient?

Healthcare workers' hands are the most common vehicle for the transmission of healthcare associated pathogens from patient to patient, and within the healthcare environment.<sup>1</sup> Thus, if hand hygiene practices are poor, microbial colonisation and/or direct transmission to patients may easily occur.

Hand hygiene is a process that reduces the number of micro-organisms on hands. It is a general term applying to the use of soap/solution and water, or a waterless antimicrobial agent to the surface of the hands (e.g. alcohol-based hand rub).<sup>2</sup>

The use of alcohol based hand rubs is considered to be the gold standard for hand hygiene in most clinical situations. This recommendation is based on the evidence of better microbial efficacy, less time required to achieve the desired

## 5 Moments for HAND HYGIENE



|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | <b>BEFORE TOUCHING A PATIENT</b>                     | When: Clean your hands before touching a patient and their immediate surroundings.<br>Why: To protect the patient against acquiring harmful germs from the hands of the HCW.                                |
| 2 | <b>BEFORE A PROCEDURE</b>                            | When: Clean your hands immediately before a procedure.<br>Why: To protect the patient from harmful germs (including their hands) from entering their body during a procedure.                               |
| 3 | <b>AFTER A PROCEDURE OF BODY FLUID EXPOSURE RISK</b> | When: Clean your hands immediately after a procedure or body fluid exposure risk.<br>Why: To protect the HCW and the healthcare surroundings from harmful patient germs.                                    |
| 4 | <b>AFTER TOUCHING A PATIENT</b>                      | When: Clean your hands after touching a patient and their immediate surroundings.<br>Why: To protect the HCW and the healthcare surroundings from harmful patient germs.                                    |
| 5 | <b>AFTER TOUCHING A PATIENT'S SURROUNDINGS</b>       | When: Clean your hands after touching any objects in a patient's surroundings when the patient has not been touched.<br>Why: To protect the HCW and the healthcare surroundings from harmful patient germs. |

effect, point of patient care accessibility and a better skin tolerance profile.<sup>3</sup>

There is convincing evidence that improved hand hygiene can reduce infection rates. More than 20 hospital based studies of the impact of hand hygiene on the risk of healthcare associated infection (HCAI) have been published between 1977 and 2008<sup>1</sup> including systematic reviews. Despite study limitations almost all reports showed an association between improved hand hygiene practices and reduced infection and cross transmission rates.

With an estimated 180,000 cases of healthcare associated infections occurring annually in Australia,<sup>4</sup> HCAI has been nominated as a priority area by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC). Many factors contribute to the development of HCAI, but hand hygiene is considered to be the “single most important intervention to prevent it”.<sup>5</sup>

The ACSQHC engaged Hand Hygiene Australia to implement the National Hand Hygiene Initiative in 2009. The key aim of the NHHI, which is based on a World Health Organisation campaign, is to develop a national culture-change programme that will:

- Achieve sustained improvements in hand hygiene compliance rates
- Reduce the rate of healthcare associated infections
- Develop an effective education system to improve knowledge of hand hygiene and infection control
- Make hand hygiene and infection prevention 'core business' for all healthcare institutions and the wider community.

Regardless of where you might work, as a healthcare practitioner you have a duty of care to protect your patients. Preventing the spread of infections is as easy as following the *Five Moments for Hand Hygiene*:

HHA now has over 449 hospitals around Australia reporting Hand Hygiene Compliance data. These data are published by the ACSQHC and on HHA website. From the latest published national data on hand hygiene compliance<sup>6</sup> healthcare workers around Australia clean their hands correctly only 63.5% of the time. Allied health professionals currently sit just under that at 60% compliance, but student allied health has only 46% compliance with correct hand hygiene.

In order to assist in the education of healthcare workers around Australia, HHA has developed an online learning package (OLP) aimed at increasing knowledge about hand hygiene. This OLP is available on the HHA website: <http://www.hha.org.au/LearningPackage.aspx>. It should only take 10–15 minutes to complete and users receive a certificate upon correct completion. In the near future there will also be an advanced OLP aimed directly at allied health staff.

For more information on the National Hand Hygiene Initiative and for useful resources including posters, screen savers and presentations, visit the HHA website [www.hha.org.au](http://www.hha.org.au).

## References

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