

## Frequently Asked Questions about...

# Hand Hygiene

### Q. What is hand hygiene?

A. Hand hygiene is a general term that refers to a method of removing germs from the hands so they cannot be transmitted to anyone else. The two most common types of hand hygiene are *hand washing with soap and water* and using an *alcohol-based hand rub*.

- **Soap and water** should be used when hands are *visibly dirty, contaminated, or soiled, after using the restroom, and before eating or preparing food*. Washing hands with soap and water is also recommended to prevent the spread of certain germs (such as *Clostridium difficile*).
- **Alcohol-based hand rubs** are products that kill germs on the hands. They are fast-acting, convenient, and generally can be used for all situations other than the ones described above. Be sure to use hand rubs that contain 60-95% ethanol or isopropanol (types of alcohol).

### Q. Why is there so much focus on hand hygiene?

A. Clean hands reduce the spread of disease! In healthcare and residential facilities, performing hand hygiene protects staff, patients/residents, and visitors from getting sick.

### Q. How should hand hygiene be performed?

A. Hand hygiene is easy and quick. Follow either one of the steps below.



#### Hand washing

- Wet hands with water, apply soap, and rub hands together (for at least 15 seconds).
- Rinse and dry with a disposable towel.
- Use a towel to turn off the faucet.



#### Alcohol-based hand rubs (use when hands are **not** visibly dirty)

- Apply to the palm of one hand, and rub hands together covering all surfaces until dry.
- Manufacturer will instruct on how much to use.

### Q. When should hand hygiene be performed?

A. Whenever hands are visibly dirty and in the situations noted below:

#### Before

- Putting on gloves
- Handling or administering medication
- Insertion of invasive devices (such as catheters)
- Touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Preparing or eating food

#### Before and After

- Contact with a patient/resident
- Changing wound dressings or bandages

#### After

- Removing gloves
- Contact with blood, body fluids or non-intact skin
- Touching surfaces or objects in a patient or resident's room that may be contaminated
- Handling garbage
- Using the restroom
- Blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing