

Hand Hygiene

Information for patients and visitors

This information is for patients, relatives and carers. It explains when and how to wash your hands and what you can expect from those looking after you in hospital.

The single most important factor in preventing the spread of infection is effective hand cleaning with soap and hot water or alcohol hand rub. This will remove most germs from the skin.

Germs not visible to the naked eye can be found on the surface of hands following contact with people, objects and the environment.

These germs can easily be passed to other people or objects and, in certain circumstances, may cause an infection.

When should you wash your hands?

- after visiting the toilet
- before preparing, handling or eating food or assisting someone with their meal
- as soon as hands become visibly dirty
- before and after visiting relatives and friends in hospital
- after coughing or sneezing into the hands

How should you wash your hands?

- wet your hands thoroughly with warm water
- apply soap – preferably liquid soap rather than bar soap, as bar soap may pass on germs
- wash all parts of the hand for 10-15 seconds, including thumbs, tips of fingers, in between fingers and back of hands
- dry hands thoroughly, preferably on paper towels - if possible, avoid hot air dryers or communal towels, as these may pass on germs
- alcohol hand rubs are available on all wards and should be used on entering or leaving patient areas, using the same technique as for washing

Please note: Alcohol hand rubs are not effective against some germs so please ask the staff what to do if you are visiting a patient who is in isolation

- It is important to moisturise your hands regularly

How to wash your hands



Rub palm to palm with hands at right angles.



Rub right palm over left back of left hand, then vice versa.



Rub palm to palm with fingers interlaced.



Rub backs of fingers in opposing palms with fingers interlocked.



Rotationally rub right thumb with left thumb, then vice versa.



Rotationally rub right palm with fingers of left hand held together then vice versa.

Hand hygiene for hospital staff

Doctors, nurses and other members of staff need to clean their hands more frequently than patients or visitors. This is because there is a risk of cross infection as they go from patient to patient providing care.

Staff are also involved in many more tasks requiring them to clean their hands, e.g. before and after:

- handling food
- giving medication
- dressing wounds
- between caring for patients

In addition, it is sometimes necessary for staff to use a pink disinfectant called chlorhexidine. This is because, for certain medical procedures, it is important to remove germs that normally do not cause a problem, from crevices of the skin or hair follicles.

As well as washing their hands, staff members will also:

- have their sleeves rolled up
- wear no jewellery other than a wedding ring
- wear no nail polish or artificial nails
- staff members should also have short nails

If you are worried that a member of staff may have forgotten to clean their hands, it is alright for you to remind them. We take hand hygiene seriously and welcome your help in keeping you safe.

Staff may also ask you not to sit on the patient's bed or ask you to wear a disposable apron and gloves. Please check with the staff if this is required.

Further questions:

The hospital has an Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPACT); they are:

Sheila Loveridge – Lead Infection Control Nurse
Specialist

A Consultant Microbiologist

Sarah Prett - Infection Control Nurse
Specialist

Jo Thomas - Director of Infection Prevention and
Control

The IPACT at Queen Victoria Hospital seeks to maintain a high standard of hand hygiene within the Trust through promotion, education, training and auditing. Should you have any further concerns or questions, please speak to the ward staff who will contact a member of the team for you, alternatively you may telephone us directly:

Infection Prevention and Control Team - Tel: 01342 414341

Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or an alternative format.