

What is this leaflet about?

Hand washing is the most important thing you can do to protect yourself and other patients. It also helps to reduce the spread of infection. This leaflet will tell you how best to keep your hands clean.

Most infections are avoidable through good hand hygiene, at the right time and in the right way. Germs naturally live on your skin and normally cause few problems. But, when you bring them in hospital they may be more serious. You often pass these germs by physical contact so it is important that **everyone** washes their hands properly.

It's ok to ask! You can ask us if we have cleaned our hands before we have any contact with you. We don't mind being reminded. It's important that you are reassured, too.

When should I clean my hands?

We try to do our best to protect you from infection but we need your help. Remember to wash your hands at these times:

- If your hands are dirty.
- Before eating.
- Before touching food.
- After using the toilet, commode, bed pan or urinal.
- After changing nappies.
- If you are being sick.
- If you have diarrhoea (where your poo is more watery or you are pooing more often).
- After coughing or sneezing.

We will help you if you need it. For example, if you have any drips or dressings that make washing your hands difficult. Again, it's ok to ask.

Everyone must wash their hands with **soap and water** before entering and when leaving a ward or clinical area if someone has **diarrhoea and vomiting**. You can ask for more advice from the Nurse in charge of the ward or department.

When is hand washing enough?

This is enough for social contact and most clinical care activities. You can wash your hands to keep yourself clean. You should always do this when your hands are dirty.

When should I use alcohol hand sanitiser?

This is a quick and easy alternative to hand washing. Use hand sanitiser when **your hands look clean**. If your hands are covered with dirt, you need to wash your hands with soap and water. Alcohol sanitiser will not work.

Can I use hand wipes?

We may offer you hand wipes as an alternative to hand washing in some areas. **Please make sure you get rid of hand wipes in waste bins. Do not flush them away in toilets as this can lead to blockages.**

How should I wash my hands?

You must wet your hands on both sides and put enough soap on to cover your hands. Rub the palms of your hands together and then the backs of your hands making a good lather. Make sure you open your fingers so you can wash in between. Rub the tips of your fingers and also wash your thumbs and wrists. Rinse them well and then dry thoroughly. These steps should take at least 20 seconds. See the diagram below.

