

## **Hand washing is the single most important thing you can do to protect yourself and our patients and reduce the spread of infection**

Most Healthcare Associated Infections are preventable through good hand hygiene, at the right time and in the correct way. Germs that naturally live on the skin and normally cause few problems may be more serious when brought into hospital. These germs are often passed from one person to another by physical contact so it is important that **patients, visitors and staff** reduce the risk of spreading infections by effectively washing their hands.

### **It's OK to ask!**

Protect yourself by asking staff if they have cleaned their hands before they have any contact with you. Staff will not mind being reminded and it's important that you are reassured.

### **When to clean your hands?**

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

- If your hands are visibly dirty.
- Before eating or handling food.
- After using the toilet/ commode/ bed pan/ urinal.
- After changing nappies.
- If you are a patient and have diarrhoea and/or vomiting.
- After coughing or sneezing

Nursing staff will assist you if required, for example if you have any drips or dressings that make hand-washing difficult. Again, it's OK to ask.

It is especially important for patients, visitors and staff to wash hands with **soap and water** before entering and when leaving a ward or clinical area where there are patients experiencing symptoms of **diarrhoea and vomiting**. Further advice should be sought from the Nurse in charge of the ward/department.

### **Hand Washing**

This is sufficient for general social contact and most clinical care activities. Hand washing can be used to maintain personal hygiene and should always be used when hands are visibly dirty.

### **Alcohol Hand Gel**

This is a quick and convenient alternative to hand washing **for hands that are visibly clean**. If hands are contaminated with dirt, alcohol gel is not effective and washing with soap and water is required.

### **Hand wipes**

Patients may be offered hand wipes as an alternative to hand washing in some areas during their hospital stay. **Please ensure you dispose of hand wipes in waste bins and not in toilets as this can lead to blockages.**

### **Hand washing technique**

For an effective hand wash, wet your hands on both sides, apply enough soap to cover hands, rub the palms of your hands together and then the backs of your hands making a good lather. Ensure you open your fingers so you can wash in between, rub the tips of your fingers and also wash your thumbs and wrists. Rinse well and then dry thoroughly. See diagram below.

