

## Hand Hygiene and Influenza-like Illness

***Hand Hygiene (thorough hand washing and drying) is the single most important measure to reduce the chances of transmitting infection from one person to another and an important measure to reduce the spread in influenza and influenza-like illness (typically consisting of sore throat, headache, muscle aches, fever and cough)..***

Hands should be washed regularly with soap and water then thoroughly dried, preferably using disposable tissues or towels. Alternatively, an alcohol-based hand gel can be used.

Hands should always be washed and dried after contact with respiratory secretions or after touching surfaces that have been contaminated with respiratory secretions.

Hand-to-face contact, which occurs during such activities as eating, normal grooming or smoking, presents significant risks because of the potential for transmitting influenza from surfaces contaminated with respiratory secretions, and for this reason, hands should always be washed and dried before any activity that involves hand-to-face contact.

### What is Hand Hygiene?

***Hand Hygiene = Hand Washing + Hand Drying***

The actions taken to decontaminate the hands of micro-organisms bacteria, protozoa and viruses with the potential to cause human illness are collectively referred to as 'hand hygiene'. In simple terms *hand hygiene is more than just hand washing*. It includes hand drying. Normal hand hygiene follows the 20/20 rule – 20 seconds to wash and 20 to dry.

#### Hand Washing

***The Ingredients = Running Water + Soap + Friction + Time***

The time spent washing is important in reducing the transmission of pathogens. Hand washing with running water, and hand friction by vigorous rubbing and soap for 20 seconds appear to result in a very small number of bacteria trans-locating to touched surfaces.

#### Hand Drying

***Time spent drying is important – 'Dry Hands Are Safe Hands'***

The drying time required to reduce the transfer of germs varies with each drying method. Repeated drying of hands on a single reused cloth towel is not recommended. This is because the towel is likely in time to become wet and may act as a source of hand contamination rather than a solution to it. Wet hands transfer bacteria more efficiently than dry hands not washed at all!

The methods and recommended duration of drying for each are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. Recommended drying methods and times**

<b>Drying method</b>	<b>Recommended protocol</b>	<b>Total drying time</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Single use cloth (roller) towel	Rub hands on two sections of towel drying for 10 seconds on each section	20 seconds	The first section removes the bulk of the water, the second achieves a thorough dryness
Single use paper towel	Rub hands on two towels drying for 10 seconds on each	20 seconds	The first towel removes the bulk of the water, the second achieves a thorough dryness
Airtowel	Rub hands together while rotating under warm air	45 seconds	Prolonged period required for complete dryness
Combination of Cloth/disposable towel and Airtowel	Rub hands on one section of cloth or disposable towel for 10 seconds to remove bulk of water then rotate while rubbing together under an air towel for 20 seconds	30 seconds	This is called the 10/20 drying method.

### **Hand Sanitizers**

The use of hand sanitizers such as alcohol-based solutions is useful to decontaminate hands if there is no access to hand washing facilities. However, their use does not replace the need for thorough hand hygiene.

Hand sanitizers should be seen as an additional hand hygiene step. Hand sanitizers are less effective when there is a build-up of organic material on the hands. If there is visual soiling of the hands full hand hygiene (washing and drying) should be performed. If there is no visual soiling hand sanitizer can be used indefinitely. One other important point to note is that after application of the sanitizer solution/gel the hands should continue to be rubbed together until they are completely dry.