

# Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is the most important way to stop the spread of infection.

Hand hygiene refers to any method which effectively removes soil and any harmful germs. These include washing with soap and water or using an alcohol based hand rub.

## How to wash your hands properly

- > Use soap and running water.
- > Wet hands thoroughly and lather with soap.
- > Rub hands vigorously for at least 10 to 15 seconds as you wash them.
- > Pay attention to the backs of hands, wrists, between fingers and under fingernails.
- > Rinse hands well under running water.
- > Dry hands with a disposable paper towel or a clean towel. To minimise chapping (reddening, roughening or cracking of skin) of hands, pat dry rather than rub them. Electric hand driers may be used. If cloth towels are used, select a fresh towel each time or if a roller towel is used, select a fresh portion of towel.
- > Turn off the tap with the used towel.
- > Use skin moisturiser, if necessary, to prevent dry cracked skin.
- > If you use skin moisturiser, it should be washed off before preparing or handling food.

Hands should be washed:

- > after going to the toilet
- > before and after handling food
- > after sneezing, coughing, blowing nose
- > after caring for someone who is sick
- > after changing a nappy
- > after handling rubbish
- > after smoking.

Cuts and abrasions should be covered with a water resistant dressing which should be changed as necessary or when the dressing becomes soiled.

## Hand soap

A bar of soap or liquid soap may be used for hand washing. If bar soap is used, ensure it is kept in a container that allows drainage. If reusable containers are used for liquid soap, they must be cleaned and dried before refilling with fresh liquid soap. The type of soap does not matter provided it is well tolerated by the user.

Antibacterial hand washes are not necessary in most cases, and may encourage the development of resistant bacteria. When soap and water are not readily available, alcohol based hand rubs are acceptable but only if the hands are not visibly soiled. Similarly, baby wipes may be useful when changing babies' nappies if there are no facilities for washing with soap and water.

### Useful website

- > **Wash, Wipe, Cover**  
<http://www.health.sa.gov.au/infectioncontrol/>