

Have you washed your hands?

Hand washing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of many infections.

To help prevent the spread of infections we ask that:

- Patients wash their hands before meals and after using the toilet or commode.
- Visitors clean their hands when entering and leaving the ward area by using the hand gel provided at the entrance to the wards, and as necessary during their visit.
- Staff clean their hands before and after any contact with a patient.
- Patients or visitors report any unclean toilet or bathroom facilities to a member of staff.

Why is hand washing important?

We pick up bacteria (germs) whenever we touch something. Even when our hands look clean, bacteria will still be present as we are unable to see bacteria with the naked eye. Hand washing is the simplest most effective way of removing bacteria from the hands.

Hand washing can prevent the spread of many infections including some infections that can pose particular problems in hospital environments such as MRSA (Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus).

What is the best way to clean your hands?

- **Hand washing, using warm water and soap** – this is an option if you have access to a hand basin. Please inform the staff if there is no soap or hand towels available in the toilets or bathroom areas.
- **Using an alcohol hand gel** – there are dispensers at the entrances to our wards which anyone entering the ward (staff or visitors) should use to clean their hands. These can be used if you are unable to get to a hand basin and are very effective at killing germs carried on your hands. They are easy to use – all you do is rub the gel onto dry hands and let it evaporate.

Important note: if your hands are dirty you should wash your hands using warm water and soap.

When should you clean your hands?

Patients – please clean your hands:

- Before every meal.
- After using the toilet or commode.
- If they are dirty.

Visitors – please clean your hands:

- When you enter and leave the ward.
- After using the toilet.
- Before touching food - if you are helping a relative or friend with their meals or bringing in food. (Please remember to check with the nursing staff if bringing in food for patients).
- If they are dirty.

Staff – should clean their hands:

- Whenever they enter the ward.
- Each time they have direct contact with a patient.
- Between contact with different patients (or their belongings/clothes/linen).
- Before handling or serving food
- After supporting patients to use the toilet or commode and after using the toilet facilities themselves.

Don't be afraid to ask

Although the staff receive training on the importance of hand hygiene sometimes they are very busy and may forget. If you think a member of staff has forgotten to clean their hands before touching you or any equipment used in your care please ask or remind them.

Staff will not mind being reminded of the importance of hand washing.

If you have any concerns about staff hand washing or the hand washing facilities on the ward please contact a member of staff or the ward manager.

You can also contact the Infection Control Nurse, Helen Nicholls on 01322 625700 or email Helen.nicholls@oxleas.nhs.uk.