

Tools for Improving Hand Hygiene

Each year, at least 2 million patients in the U.S. acquire a healthcare-associated infection during their stay in the hospital, and 247 die as a result.¹

According to the World Health Organization, hand hygiene is the primary measure to reduce infections and enhance patient safety. Unfortunately, notes WHO, the lack of compliance among healthcare providers is problematic.

To address the problem, WHO, with the help of more than 100 international experts, developed [WHO Guidelines for Hand Hygiene in Health Care \(Advanced Draft\)](#). The Guidelines are designed to provide healthcare workers, hospital administrators and health authorities with the best scientific evidence and recommendations to improve practices and reduce healthcare-associated infections. Among other topics, the Guidelines discuss:

- Indications for hand washing and hand antisepsis
- Hand hygiene technique
- Recommendations for surgical hand preparation
- Selection and handling of hand hygiene agents
- Skin care
- Use of gloves
- Other aspects of hand hygiene
- Healthcare worker educational training and motivational programs
- Governmental and institutional responsibilities

Another useful hand hygiene tool is available from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI). IHI makes available its [How-to Guide: Improving Hand Hygiene](#). This Guide is designed to help organizations reduce healthcare-associated infections, including infections due to antibiotic-resistant organisms, by improving hand hygiene practices and the use of gloves among healthcare workers. Among other topics, this Guide includes:

- A description of the case for improving hand hygiene and the use of gloves among healthcare workers
- Recommended evidence-based interventions that will result in improvement
- How to begin improving hand hygiene compliance in your organization, including establishing a team, setting aims, testing changes, and measuring results
- Measurement support tools

Ready to Change Hand Soap?

Healthcare facilities looking to improve compliance with hand hygiene protocols may find themselves switching to a new hand soap, in an effort to provide a hand cleanser that's most acceptable to staff. The problem? An issue known as "Soap Change-Over Phenomenon," which can cause dry, chapped skin.

"Change-Over Phenomenon is something that may happen about two to five weeks after switching to a new soap formulation," explains Kimberly Dennis MacDougall, senior research scientist, Kimberly-Clark Professional. "It's most likely to occur between October and May, when the humidity and temperatures are low and when skin is drier and more easily chapped."

MacDougall notes that high-frequency users like nurses who wash their hands more than 20 times a day, are most likely to experience a problem, as are those with sensitive skin. Usually, four to six percent of the high frequency users are affected.

“While a hand and body lotion can help ease the dryness during the transition period to a new soap, it is important to avoid switching to yet another soap formulation,” MacDougall says. “The skin needs time to adapt to the new soap formulation. This usually takes about eight weeks. If you switch soaps prematurely, you may start the clock all over and potentially even more people will experience problems as their skin tries to adjust to multiple, back-to-back changes.”

¹ WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Healthcare (Advanced Draft): A Summary. World Health Organization, 2005. http://www.who.int/patientsafety/information_centre/ghhad_download/en/