

Healthy Hands at Work

Being sick at work is everyone's business



Implementation Toolbox



Introduction

The Healthy Hands at Work resources were developed to meet the growing need to provide, and to be part of, a healthy work environment. Being sick at work is everyone's business and workplace hygiene is everyone's responsibility.

Healthy Hands at Work resources:

Employer Handbook outlines the personal and workspace hygiene principles that will help keep your work environment healthy. These principles can help you to develop a hygiene policy for your workplace.

Worker Handbook provides information for workers. The Worker Handbook is included in the Employer Handbook, identified by color coded green bars at the top of the page.

Implementation Toolbox lists steps to help put the recommendations in the Employer Handbook into practice, including suggestions for hands-on workplace education, setting a good example and hygiene policy development.

Five Minute Tips are single page notices to be posted on bulletin boards and/or presented during staff meetings. Speaking points are listed on the reverse side. Topics cover basic hygiene principles included in the Worker and Employer handbooks.

These resources provide:

- Tips and suggestions for initiating hygiene awareness
- Additional resources to assist with implementation in the workplace
- Steps to aid in policy development

Getting Started – Raising Workplace Awareness

Step 1

- Read the Healthy Hands at Work Employer Handbook.
- Distribute the Healthy Hands at Work Worker Handbook to all staff. Include the Worker Handbook in your workplace orientation package.
- Display hand hygiene signs and reminders on office bulletin boards and in common areas. Change occasionally so messages don't become stale.
- Initiate a handwashing campaign at the start of influenza (flu) season. Make this an annual event.
- Provide a handwashing demonstration or show a handwashing video for all workers as part of your handwashing campaign and in orientation sessions for new workers. An occupational health nurse could help here.
- Let workers know about on-line self-learning tools (handwashing videos, adult learning slide sets, video games).

Resources are available at:
www.dobugsneeddrugs.org/occhealth

Lead By Example

Step 2

- Show workers that you are serious about workplace hygiene by setting a good example.
- Refer to the Employer Handbook to know how and when to wash your hands.
- Always wash your hands after using the washroom. Use good technique and avoid recontaminating your hands on the taps or washroom door.
- Wash your hands before eating. Before lunch or before meetings where food is being served, make sure to wash your hands and encourage others to do the same.
- Practice good respiratory etiquette.
- Get an annual influenza (flu) vaccination.
- If you are sick, stay home. Do not come to work if you are likely to spread your infection to co-workers.

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Create a Supportive Workplace Environment

Step 3

- Review the Employer Handbook regarding respiratory infection issues: prevention, causes, treatment, absenteeism, hand and environmental hygiene products.
- Use the Workplace Hand Hygiene Checklist (provided at the end of this document) to identify barriers to proper handwashing on site. For help with removing barriers, refer to the Employer Handbook for practical solutions to handwashing problems.
- For areas where soap and water are not available, such as trucks, buses, or outdoor work areas, provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers and plain (not antibacterial or disinfecting) hand wipes.
- Establish criteria for washroom maintenance. Make sure washrooms are properly stocked and cleaned.
- Hold an annual influenza (flu) vaccination clinic or organize a process for workers to receive the influenza (flu) vaccination off-site.
- Provide workers with positive feedback and reinforcement.

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Encourage Workplace Involvement

Step 4

- Make hand hygiene everyone's responsibility.
- Encourage workers to help to identify barriers to proper handwashing and to find ways to make handwashing easier and more efficient.
- Ask workers to provide suggestions to facilitate additional infection control measures in the workplace.
- Implement any ideas or suggestions that would improve hygiene in the workplace.
- Provide information to workers for extending hygiene practices to the home and community.

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Develop a Workplace Hygiene Policy

Step 5

Gather Background Information

- Review any existing workplace hygiene policies you may have and identify issues that may be missing or out-of-date (compare with information in the Employer Handbook).
- Ask for comments and suggestions from workers and management about issues that need to be included in workplace hygiene policies. These may have already been gathered while implementing Steps 1 - 4.
- Collect samples of workplace hygiene policies from other organizations or stakeholders to use as a guide. Make sure information in the sample policies is consistent with the recommendations in the Employer Handbook.

Develop Hygiene Policy

- Organize a group of management and workers to collaborate on your workplace hygiene policy.
- Identify the topics to be covered in your workplace policy (see below).
- Write a draft of your policy. Accuracy of information and clarity of writing are important.
- Ask for review of your final draft from others in your workplace and colleagues in other organizations or with expertise in workplace health and safety. Both internal and external review can be helpful.
- Revise and finalize your workplace hygiene policy.
- Include your new workplace hygiene policy with other workplace policies and guidelines.
- Draft a plan for implementation, dissemination and enforcement issues for the new policy.

Topics for a Workplace Hygiene Policy

Hand Hygiene

- How to wash your hands
- When to wash your hands
- Soap product selection
- Soap dispensers and holders
- Hand sanitizer use – when and why
- Hand sanitizer selection
- Location of hand sanitizer dispensers
- Hygiene for specific types of workspaces (vehicles, field workers, etc.)

Washroom maintenance

- Cleaning schedule
- Cleaning procedure
- Soap, towels and hot air dryers
- Product selection

Workspace surface cleaning

- Schedule
- Product selection

When to clean and when to disinfect

- Cleaning products selection and use
- Disinfectant products selection and use

Sick Days policy

Resources are available at:
www.dobugsneeddrugs.org/occhealth

Sample Workplace Policy for Hand Hygiene

Rationale. Handwashing is the best way to stop the spread of infections.

Handwashing. Workers should always wash their hands after using the washroom and before eating or preparing food. Handwashing is recommended after other activities when hands might be significantly contaminated (for example after blowing your nose or handling trash) or when hands might come in contact with the eyes, nose or mouth (for example when inserting or removing contact lenses).

To wash properly, wet your hands, apply soap, rub for 20 seconds making sure to cover all skin surfaces of the hands, rinse for 10 seconds or until soap is removed, and dry, preferably with a clean disposable towel. To prevent recontaminating the hands, use the towel to turn off the tap and open the washroom door. If towels are not available find alternate methods to avoid recontamination.

Soap product selection. Use plain soap. Do not use antibacterial soap containing triclosan (or related compounds such as triclocarban) because of the risk of promoting resistance in bacteria to antibiotics. Plain soap works just as well as antibacterial soap in preventing infections.

Liquid, foam and bar soaps are all effective in cleaning the hands. For liquid and foam soap, regularly clean the part of the container that is touched by the hands (pump, button, lever). Liquid soap dispensers should not be “topped up”. Wash the soap dispenser and allow it dry before refilling.

Bar soap holders should allow for drainage so that the soap is not standing in water and can air dry. Soap holders should be regularly cleaned.

Hand sanitizers. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used to kill germs on the hands if soap and water are not available. If the hands are greasy or visibly dirty, clean them first with a cleansing wipe (not antibacterial or disinfecting) prior to using the hand sanitizer. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not a substitute for handwashing. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers and cleansing wipes should be provided in workplace sites where soap and water are not available.

Hand sanitizer product selection. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers need to be at least 60% alcohol (ethanol, propanol, n-propanol) to be effective and should contain no other active ingredient.

Only alcohol-based hand sanitizers are recommended by Alberta Health Services and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Non alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not recommended by Alberta Health Services and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Location of hand sanitizer dispensers. Hand sanitizers should not be placed in a washroom and should be located in areas where there is no access to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are flammable and should not be placed near a source of heat or over an electrical outlet. Hand sanitizers are poisonous if consumed and should be in a supervised location if you work with children or others requiring supervision.

Continuing Education

Step 6

- Implement an annual handwashing campaign at the beginning of influenza (flu) season.
- Include a handwashing demonstration or video and hand hygiene recommendations in orientation for new staff.
- Use the Five Minute Tips for information sessions for staff. Post the tips on bulletin boards and in common areas.
- Repetition of messaging is a key factor.
- Provide employees with measures of success such as reduced rates of absenteeism due to new policy implementation.
- Check the Do Bugs Need Drugs? website for new resources.

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WORKPLACE HAND HYGIENE CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to assess hand hygiene facilities in your workplace. Refer to the Employer Handbook for practical solutions.

Item	Observation	Hygiene principle	Possible solutions
Is soap available in the washroom?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soap is needed to wash germs from the hands. Water alone does not work. 	
Are you using plain soap? Plain soap does not contain triclosan.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain soap works just as well as antibacterial soap to prevent illness. • Plain soap does not contain triclosan, which promotes antibiotic resistance. 	
Does the sink have manual taps?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands can be recontaminated when turning off manual taps. 	
Does the sink have push-type taps?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push-type taps require repeated contact as they do not stay on long enough for proper handwashing. Hands can be recontaminated. 	
Is warm water available?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm water works better than cold water to remove dirt, grime, germs and soap. • Cold water is a deterrent to good handwashing. 	
Is there a paper towel dispenser? Are paper towels available?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper towels are the preferred way to dry hands. The friction of drying with a towel removes 42% more germs than washing alone. • If taps are not automatic and if hands are needed to open the washroom door, paper towels are needed to avoid recontamination. 	
Are hot air dryers available?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot air dryers can leave the hands warm and moist, ideal conditions for the re-growth of organisms. 	
Is the washroom clean and well maintained?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean washrooms encourage and facilitate proper handwashing and reduce the chance of contaminating the hands. 	

Item	Observation	Hygiene principle	Possible solutions
Are hand sanitizers located in the washroom?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand sanitizers should not be located in the washroom and should be located where soap and water are not available. • Hand sanitizers and soap dispensers and bottles look alike and can be confused. Hand sanitizers are not for handwashing. 	
Do you provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer* in places where soap and water are not available?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If hands are not dirty or greasy, hand sanitizers that contain alcohol (>60% ethanol, propanol or n-propanol) as the only active ingredient will kill germs and not lead to antibiotic resistance. 	
Does the washroom door need to be touched to exit the washroom?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands can be recontaminated by touching the washroom door when exiting. 	
Is the waste can near or outside the washroom door?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placing the waste can near or outside the washroom door encourages using a paper towel to open the door on exiting. 	
Are handwashing signs or stickers posted in the washroom?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handwashing signs are good reminders about the importance of handwashing. 	
Do you have a written policy or recommendations about hand hygiene in the workplace?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written policies or recommendations about handwashing help everyone in your workplace understand the importance of proper handwashing in preventing illness. 	
Are employers positive role models?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers should know the basics of how and when to wash both to protect themselves and to set a good example. 	
Have workers received information about hand hygiene?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers need to understand the importance of handwashing in preventing infections. • Evidence that handwashing works can be empowering and encourages leadership. 	

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