Healthy Hands at Work
Being sick at work is everyone’s business
When to wash your hands

- Before eating or preparing food
- After using the toilet
- After blowing your nose
- After handling shared objects
- Before handling contact lenses

How to wash your hands

1. Wet your hands.
3. Rub your palms, between your fingers, backs of hands, wrists, thumbs, fingertips and nails. This takes about 20 seconds.
4. Rinse for 10 seconds or until all soap is gone.
5. Dry your hands with a clean disposable towel.
6. Use the towel to turn off the tap and let yourself out the door.

Use plain soap. Antibacterial soap does not work any better than plain soap in preventing infections. Antibacterial soap contains triclosan, a chemical that can cause antibiotic resistance.

Make sure plain soap and water are available at your workplace and where you eat!
Healthy Hands at Work

In the workplace, hand sanitizers are not a substitute for handwashing. Routine handwashing is needed to remove the dirt and grease that keep hand sanitizers from working.

HAND SANITIZERS

When to use a hand sanitizer

- Use hand sanitizers only when soap and water are unavailable.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers only work if your hands are not dirty or greasy.
- When soap and water are not available and your hands are dirty or greasy, use a cleansing hand wipe (not antibacterial or disinfecting) followed by an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers

**Only alcohol-based hand sanitizers are recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada.**

- Select hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol (ethanol, propanol or n-propanol) as the only active ingredient.
- Foaming or liquid gels are both effective.

**Non-alcohol based hand sanitizers are not recommended.** The active ingredient in these products is benzalkonium chloride, a chemical that can lead to antibiotic resistance.

HAND SANITIZERS
PREVENTING INFECTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Keep your hands clean and away from your face

• 80% of respiratory tract infections can be spread by the hands.
• Your hands can pick up germs from work surfaces and from items you share with co-workers.
• When you touch the inside of your nose, eyes or mouth with your hands, germs can get into the body to cause infection.

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

Annual influenza (flu) immunization

• Protect yourself from influenza (flu) by getting an annual vaccination.
• Influenza can make you sick for 7-10 days and can lead to serious complications such as pneumonia.
Respiratory etiquette

• Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough to avoid spreading germs in the air.

• If you do not have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.

• Throw away used tissues promptly.

Other things you can do

• Don’t share food items, eating utensils, coffee cups, drinking glasses.

• Don’t share cigarettes if you smoke. If you smoke, try to quit. Smoking is a health risk for respiratory infections.

• Don’t share personal care items such as lip balm or cosmetics.

• Clean workspaces and objects that are shared with co-workers.
Symptoms

Depending on what part of your respiratory tract is infected, symptoms can include:

- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Fever
- Loss of voice
- Ear pain
- Facial pain
- Headache
- Feeling tired
- Body aches

More serious symptoms are:

- Chest pain
- Shaking chills
- Shortness of breath

Self care

What can you do to feel better if you have a respiratory tract infection?

- Rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Take fever-reducing medication such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever and pain.
- Use cough medicine to allow sleep and rest.
- Decongestants may help if you have a stuffy nose.
- Ask your pharmacist for help with over-the-counter medications.

What's making me sick?

Viral infections. Most respiratory tract infections are caused by viruses. Viral infections can make you just as sick as infections caused by bacteria. Viral infections are more contagious than bacterial infections, so if more than one person in your family has the same illness, it is most likely a viral infection.

Bacterial infections. Bacterial infections are less common than viral infections and don’t spread as easily from one person to another.
Do I need an antibiotic?

- Antibiotics work against bacterial infections but not against viral infections.
- Your doctor may do tests to find out if your infection is caused by bacteria.
- Avoid unneeded use of antibiotics and possible side effects that may occur when you take antibiotics.
- Inappropriate use of antibiotics can cause bacteria to become resistant to antibiotics, so that antibiotics no longer work.
- You can carry antibiotic resistant bacteria in your body for a long time, which can result in infections later on that are difficult to treat.
- Antibiotics need to be used responsibly.

What causes these infections?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infection</th>
<th>Caused by Bacteria</th>
<th>Caused by Viruses</th>
<th>Will an antibiotic help?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colds</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenza (flu)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>No*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sore throat</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Most</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laryngitis</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronchitis**</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Most</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinus infection</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Most</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear infection</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pneumonia</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Usually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Antivirals do exist and are recommended in certain situations.
** In otherwise healthy people.
When to stay home

• If you are not feeling well enough to work, stay home.
• If you have influenza (flu), stay home until you are feeling better and avoid going out except to seek medical attention.
• Ask your occupational health nurse, family physician or nurse practitioner whether your symptoms indicate you should stay home from work.
• Call your provincial health line for health information and advice about symptoms, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Know the number for your provincial health line and keep the number handy.

When to seek immediate medical attention

Go to the emergency department if you have any of the following symptoms:

• Trouble breathing not caused by a stuffy nose
• Stiff neck or severe headache with fever and chills

It usually takes about a week to get over a viral respiratory infection, but sometimes it takes as long as three weeks to fully recover.
WHAT IS ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE?

**Antibiotics** are medications that can kill bacteria or stop them from multiplying.

**Antibiotic resistance** is the ability of bacteria to withstand the effects of an antibiotic.

**Antibiotic resistance is a threat to your health**

- Infections caused by resistant bacteria are difficult to treat.
- Antibiotic resistant infections can lead to prolonged illness and hospitalization.
- Some antibiotic resistant infections are impossible to treat.

**Use antibiotics wisely**

- Unnecessary use of antibiotics leads to antibiotic resistance.
- When you have an infection and are not prescribed an antibiotic, it is because your infection is most likely caused by a virus.
- If you are prescribed an antibiotic, take all of the medication as directed even if you are feeling better before it is finished.
- Use soaps and cleaning products that do not lead to antibiotic resistance.

About half of the antibiotics prescribed for respiratory tract infections are inappropriate because most of these infections are caused by viruses.

Wise use of antibiotics is everyone’s responsibility.

It is the bacteria that are resistant, not you. Even if you have never taken an antibiotic, you can get an antibiotic resistant infection from someone else.
Cleaners

- Plain cleaning products remove germs, and the dirt and grime that attract germs, by washing them away.
- **Use for routine cleaning of shared workplace surfaces** such as computer keyboards, telephones, refrigerator door handles, steering wheels, tools and other frequently handled objects.
- Plain cleaning agents do not lead to antibiotic resistance.
- **Avoid antibacterial products containing triclosan** because they do not work any better than plain cleaning agents and triclosan can lead to antibiotic resistance.

Disinfectants

- Disinfectants kill 99.9% of germs if used according to instructions. **Improper use can lead to antibiotic resistance** in the germs that are not killed.
- **Use for cleaning up body fluids** (blood, vomit, sputum, urine or feces) or places where this contamination might be found, such as washrooms.
- Food preparation and handling surfaces should be disinfected according to provincial food services codes.
- Public health emergencies may require special disinfecting procedures.
- Instructions for disinfecting wipes state that the surface must remain wet for several minutes. This is often difficult to achieve and can lead to reduced germ kill and increased antibiotic resistance. These products are not recommended.
- Do not use disinfecting wipes on the skin. They are only meant to be used on hard smooth surfaces.

**Read the labels.**
Avoid antibacterial products containing triclosan. When disinfection is needed, use the product according to instructions.
SOAPS AND CLEANING AGENTS

RECOMMENDED

**INGREDIENTS:** Aqua (Water), Sodium Laureth Sulfate, Cocamidopropyl Betaine, Glyceryl Stearate, Glycerin, Aloe Barbadensis Gel, Tocopherol Acetate (Vitamin E), Citric Acid, Sodium Chloride, Sodium Citrate, Benzophenone-4, Methylisothiazolinone, Parfum (Fragrance), Ext. Violet 2 (CI 60730)

Use plain soap and cleaners that do not contain triclosan

NOT RECOMMENDED

**Drug Facts**

**Active ingredient** | **Purpose**
--- | ---
Triclosan 0.10% | Antibacterial hand soap

Avoid antibacterial soaps and cleaners containing triclosan

HAND SANITIZERS

RECOMMENDED

**ACTIVE INGREDIENTS/INGRÉDIENTS ACTIF :**
Denatured Ethanol 62% w/w
**OTHER INGREDIENTS/AUTRES INGRÉDIENTS :**
Aqua, Oleth-20, Carbomer, Parfum, Aminomethylpropanol, Aloe Barbadensis Leaf Extract

Use hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol (ethanol, propanol, n-propanol) as the only active ingredient

NOT RECOMMENDED

**ACTIVE INGREDIENTS/INGRÉDIENTS ACTIF :**
Benzalkonium Chloride 0.15% w/w
**INACTIVE INGREDIENTS/AUTRES INGRÉDIENTS :**
Aqua, Polysorbate 20, Aloe Barbadensis, Parfum

Do not use hand sanitizers that contain benzalkonium chloride

DISINFECTANTS

**USE ONLY AS DIRECTED**

If surfaces are visibly dirty, clean first. To disinfect: Dilute 250 ml per 4 litres of water, apply with sponge or mop. All surfaces should be thoroughly wet. Let stand 10 minutes, then wipe dry. Rinse all food preparation areas with potable water. Use a fresh bucket of solution every time you clean. Wear rubber gloves if you have sensitive skin. Kills germs on hard non-porous surfaces.

Use disinfectants at the right concentration and for the right length of time

DISINFECTING WIPES

**USE ONLY AS DIRECTED**

To Disinfect: Kills bacteria on hard, non-porous surfaces. Wipe surface to be disinfected. Allow surface to remain wet for 10 minutes before use. Let surface dry. No need to rinse. For highly-soiled surfaces, clean excess dirt first. In food preparation areas, wash disinfected surfaces with potable water before allowing contact with food.

Disinfecting wipes can be difficult to use as directed. Use disinfecting wipes only when they can be used as directed. Disinfecting wipes should not be used on the skin.
FOR EMPLOYERS

Absenteism and sick time

- Workers who come to work with respiratory infections can easily spread them to co-workers.
- Contamination of shared workspaces is likely. Cleaning of workspaces, tools and equipment is necessary.
- Workers sick at work leads to the spread of infections, reduced productivity, increased sick time and increased benefit plan usage (doctor visits, medication costs, alternative therapy visits).

Influenza can significantly contribute to absenteeism. The average time away from work from a case of influenza (flu) is 4-7 days.
Sick leave and return to work policies

- Develop sick leave and return to work policies if you do not already have them.
- **Important!** Do not require that a worker have a prescription for an antibiotic in order to return to work.

Do your policies consider the following?

- Recommendations for influenza. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that workers with influenza (flu) stay home until they feel better and avoid going out except to seek medical attention.
- Flexibility in the number of sick days.
- Addressing sick leave on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your occupational health nurse, nurse practitioner or medical director.
- Allowing workers to work from home if they are sick.
- Identification of medical conditions that require a doctor’s note or fitness to work examination before returning to work.

Worker benefits

- Are your workers aware of your sick leave and return to work policies?
- Are your workers aware of their medical benefits?
- Do you have benefits in place for extended illness or sick leave?
- Does your company provide benefit coverage for salary continuation in the event of prolonged illness?
## Practical solutions to handwashing problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>HYGIENE PRINCIPLE</th>
<th>SOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soap or paper towels not available</td>
<td>Handwashing stops the spread of infections.</td>
<td>Make sure people responsible for washroom supplies understand the importance of handwashing. Handwashing protects them too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towels are shared</td>
<td>Sharing towels leads to the spread of germs. Significantly more germs are removed by drying the hands with a towel compared with washing alone. These germs come off on the towel and can be spread to others.</td>
<td>Install a paper towel dispenser.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taps go off automatically and water does not run long enough</td>
<td>Water needs to run long enough to rinse off soap and germs. Repeated touching of the tap recontaminates the hands.</td>
<td>Encourage workers to use their forearm or wrist instead of touching the tap with their hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm water not available</td>
<td>Cold water is a deterrent to handwashing and results in less effective handwashing.</td>
<td>If it is not possible to have warm water, use cold. Cold water is less comfortable but will work (with soap) to remove germs from the hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper towel dispenser is far away from the sink</td>
<td>Good handwashing technique includes using a paper towel to turn off the taps. This prevents recontamination of the hands from dirty taps.</td>
<td>To avoid having the taps running for a long time, suggest that workers get their paper towel before washing their hands. The towel can be tucked under the arm or into a pocket until it is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEM</td>
<td>HYGIENE PRINCIPLE</td>
<td>SOLUTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper towel dispenser has a lever or button</td>
<td>Hands can be recontaminated by touching the lever or button to dispense a paper towel.</td>
<td>Encourage workers to use an elbow or forearm to dispense the towel or suggest they get the paper towel before washing their hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wastebasket is not near the door</td>
<td>Hands can be recontaminated by touching the washroom door or handle. Good handwashing technique includes using the paper towel to open the washroom door.</td>
<td>Move the wastebasket close to the door or prop open the door. If neither are possible, suggest that workers take the towel with them and throw it away at their next opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwashing takes too much time</td>
<td>Handwashing prevents illness and reduces absenteeism. In the long run it saves time.</td>
<td>Establish workplace recommendations for handwashing including before eating and after using the toilet. Teach good handwashing technique and remove barriers so that workers become proficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know if antibacterial soap is in use</td>
<td>Plain soap does not promote antibiotic resistance and is equally effective in preventing infections.</td>
<td>Read the ingredients. If the soap contains “triclosan” it is antibacterial. If antibacterial soap is in use, switch to plain soap. Plain soap is generally less expensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand sanitizers and soaps look alike and can be confused</td>
<td>Hand sanitizers should not be used for handwashing. Hand sanitizers should only be used when soap and water are not available.</td>
<td>To avoid confusion, do not place hand sanitizer dispensers or bottles near the sink or in the washroom. Place hand sanitizers in locations where handwashing is unavailable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands are dirty or greasy and soap and water are not available</td>
<td>Hand sanitizers work only if hands are not greasy or dirty.</td>
<td>Use a cleansing hand wipe (not antibacterial or disinfecting) followed by an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (≥60% alcohol and alcohol is the only active ingredient).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Workspace cleaning

- Establish a routine for cleaning workstations. Clean more often if you or your co-workers have respiratory tract infections.
- Use plain cleaning products (not antibacterial) to remove germs and wash them away (see page 10).
- Disinfecting products are not needed unless you are removing body fluids or work in a food preparation area (see page 10).
- Common areas such as meeting rooms, waiting rooms, customer service counters and vehicle interiors, as well as kitchens and washrooms, need to be cleaned regularly.
- Special procedures may be recommended by your public health department if health issues arise.

Placement of hand sanitizers

- Because alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not a substitute for handwashing, they should not be placed in a washroom or near a sink.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are flammable and should not be located near a source of heat or over an electrical outlet.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are poisonous if consumed, so place in a supervised location if you work with children or others requiring supervision.
Definition of terms used in this booklet

**Antibacterial** agents are biologically active chemicals that attack bacteria. These chemicals are added to some soaps, detergents, personal care products, household cleaning agents and other consumer goods.

**Antiseptics** kill germs on the skin. Hand sanitizers are actually antiseptics.

**Cleaners** are soaps and detergents that remove dirt, grease and germs and allow them to be washed away.

**Soaps** are cleaners that contain natural oils or fats and lye (or chemicals related to lye).

**Detergents** are similar to soap but contain man-made compounds instead of natural oils or fats.

**Disinfectants** kill 99.9% of germs on hard, non-porous surfaces. Disinfectants are needed to clean surfaces that have been exposed to body fluids and in food preparation areas. Note: Disinfectants must be used as directed on the product label in order to be safe and effective.

**Sanitizers** kill germs on hard, non-porous surfaces and reduce the germ count to safe levels.

**Sterilization** kills or removes all biological material including germs. Sterilization is used, for example, in the food industry (canning) and in health care (surgical instruments).
OHS Information

Hand cleaning facilities

Does your OHS code specify:

- Number and location of handwashing or hand cleaning stations?
- Provision of hand cleaning agents?
- Provisions for hand drying?
- Maintenance standards?
- Sanitation standards?

Become familiar with the OHS Code for hand cleaning in your jurisdiction.
How can I start a Healthy Hands at Work program?

- Show workers you are serious about workplace hygiene. Set a good example.
- Identify potential barriers to good handwashing in your workplace and use the guide on pages 14-15 to find practical solutions.
- Encourage workers to get an annual influenza (flu) vaccination. Offer vaccination at work or organize a process for workers to receive influenza vaccine off-site.
- Ask your occupational health nurse to organize a lunch and learn program to promote the concepts in this booklet.
- Hold an annual handwashing campaign at the start of influenza (flu) season.
- Include the Worker Handbook in your workplace orientation package, make them available in your lunchroom, and/or distribute at influenza (flu) vaccination clinics.

For additional resources to support your Healthy Hands at Work program: www.dobugsneeddrugs.org/occhealth
Being sick at work is everyone’s business

- Lost productivity
- Increased sick time
- Increased benefit use
- Replacement worker time
- Workplace fatigue / distraction
- Spread of infections to co-workers
- Bringing germs home to your family

Get a Healthy Hands at Work program started in your workplace

- Step by step implementation toolbox
- 5-minute tips
- AV materials
- Signs and stickers

www.dobugsneeddrugs.org/occhealth

www.dobugsneeddrugs.org  1-800-931-9111  info@dobugsneeddrugs.org

08/2014