

Say No to Infection Hand Hygiene Fact Sheet



The history of hand washing

The **CORONAVIRUS 19** pandemic, highlighted the importance of hand washing but where did hand washing first originate?

The quick version ... Stepping back to 1846 a gentleman Physician named Ignaz Semmelweis noticed that women giving birth on wards that were Doctor led were more likely to contract a fever and die than those women giving birth led by midwives.

The reasons why may shock you The doctors on the medical ward routinely performed autopsies (not washing hands) prior to delivering infants as opposed to midwives who predominately worked on the labour wards.

Moving on, a year later, Semmelweis conducted research and found that if medics and midwives washed their hands in a chlorine-based liquid before delivering infants the death rates fell dramatically. Sadly, his work at the time was met with disregard and after many years of challenges he ironically died of streptococcal blood poisoning which he acquired from a wound in his hand while doing an operation.

In steps Florence Nightingale ...

Florence Nightingale

A quick introduction - Florence Nightingale (also known as 'the lady of the lamp') was a nurse in the 1850's who became famous due to the implementation of hand washing and other hygiene practices in the Crimean War. However, after her demise, her work in conjunction with the previous work of Semmelweis lay dormant for approx. 100 years. Interesting, it was not until the 1980's when a string of foodborne outbreaks and healthcare associated infections (HCAI) led to public concern. Handwashing was reborn and has continued to grow from strength to strength to what we see today.

What is hand hygiene?

Hand hygiene is considered the single most effective method of reducing the transmission of infectious agents that cause healthcare associated infections (HCAI). The practice of Hand hygiene is the act of physically or mechanically removing dirt, organic matter and most micro-organisms acquired through direct contact with a person, and from the environment.

World Health Organisation 5 moments of hand hygiene

These are the 5 moments:

1. Before patient contact
2. Before a clean/aseptic procedure
3. After body fluid exposure risk
4. After patient contact
5. After contact with patient surroundings

[Please click on the link for the 5 moments of hand hygiene poster](#)

What does 'bare below the elbow mean?

Relatively new to the hand washing group 'bare below the elbow' was introduced by the NHS in the year 2008. This infection prevention strategy is intended to **reduce transmission of pathogens to the resident/service user** that may occur from a **healthcare worker's contaminated clothing/jewellery**.

It encompasses the following:

- Short sleeves
- No bracelets
- No wrist watches/braids
- No stoned rings
- No false nails, nail extensions, nail art, nail jewellery/nail varnish
- Keep nails clean and short
- 1 x gold ring (i.e., wedding) can be worn

What is the difference between alcohol gel/soap and water?

Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) is an alcohol-containing preparation (liquid, gel or foam) designed for application to the hands to inactivate microorganisms and/or temporarily suppress their growth. Such preparations may contain one or more types of alcohol, other active ingredients with excipients, and emollients.

The use of soap and water to clean hands is the physical act of removing dirt and microorganisms from the hands. Soap and water should be used when in contact with body fluids i.e., vomit, faeces, blood.

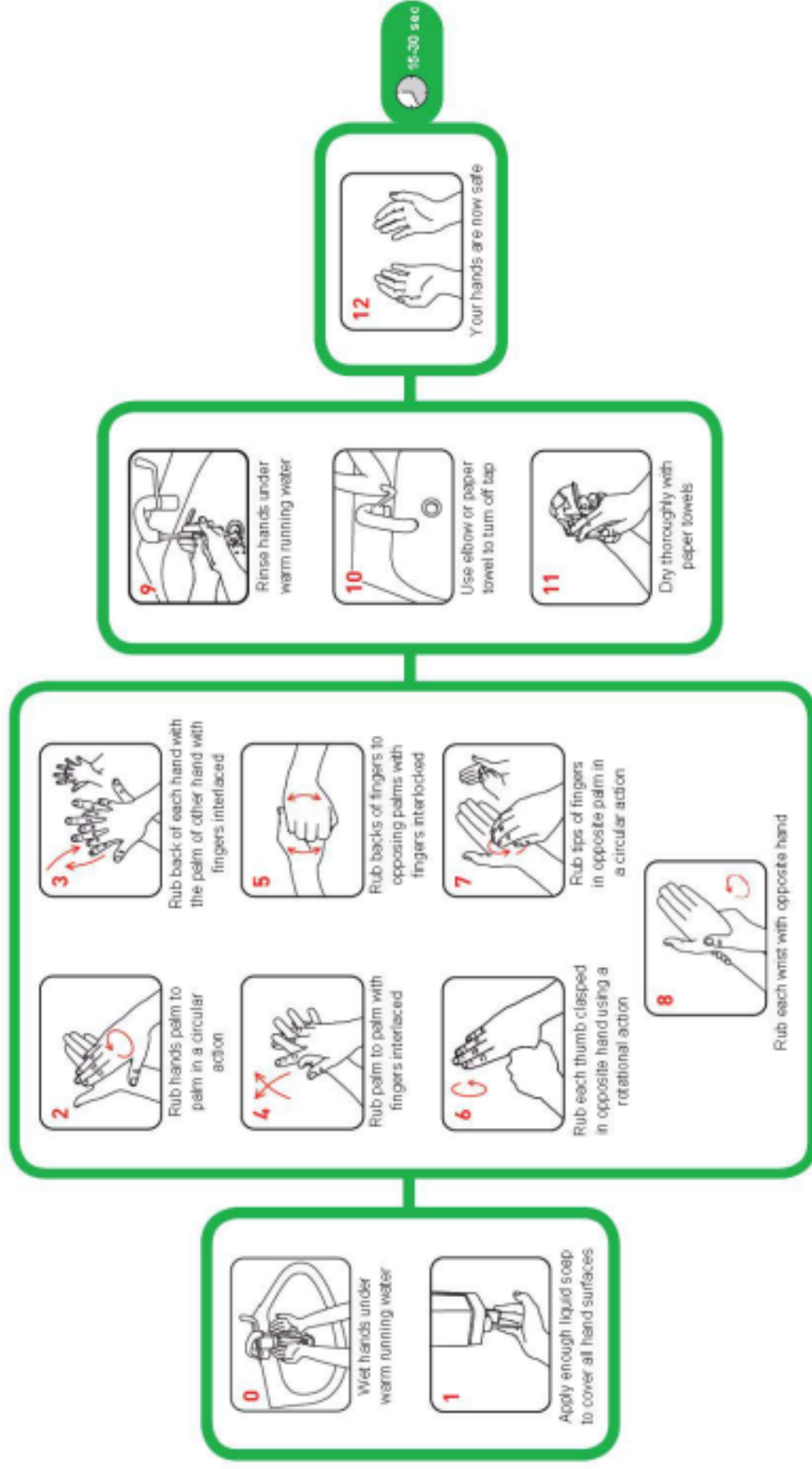
Alcohol-based hand rubs are used at the point of care on clean hands.

Alcohol hand rub is **not** effective at killing viral gastroenteritis/*c.diff* spores.

[Additional Resources for Care Homes](#)

HAND HYGIENE TECHNIQUE FOR STAFF

Using liquid soap and warm water



KEY MOMENTS FOR HAND HYGIENE

Your 5 moments for hand hygiene at the point of care*



*Based on WHO poster "Your 5 moments for hand hygiene" and reproduced with their kind permission

1 BEFORE PATIENT CONTACT	WHEN? Clean your hands before touching a patient when approaching him/her. WHY? To protect the patient against harmful germs carried on your hands.
2 BEFORE A CLEAN/ASEPTIC PROCEDURE	WHEN? Clean your hands immediately before any clean/aseptic procedure. WHY? To protect the patient against harmful germs, including the patient's own, from entering his/her body.
3 AFTER BODY FLUID EXPOSURE RISK	WHEN? Clean your hands immediately after an exposure risk to body fluids (and after glove removal). WHY? To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs.
4 AFTER PATIENT CONTACT	WHEN? Clean your hands after touching a patient and her/his immediate surroundings, when leaving the patient's side. WHY? To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs.
5 AFTER CONTACT WITH PATIENT SURROUNDINGS	WHEN? Clean your hands after touching any object or furniture in the patient's immediate surroundings when leaving—even if the patient has not been touched. WHY? To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs.

