

Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings

New Jersey Department of Health



Hand hygiene is a tenant of public health and infection prevention and is often cited as the most important measure to prevent transmission of harmful microbes in the healthcare setting. This Infection Control Assessment & Response (ICAR) resource aims to promote the use of alcohol-based hand rubs (ABHR) by addressing misconceptions regarding its safety, use, and efficacy in healthcare settings, including long-term care facilities. The New Jersey Department of Health encourages facilities to:

- Evaluate the availability of ABHR at readily accessible points of direct care
- Update policies and procedures to reflect current national guidelines
- Include a competency-based training program for hand hygiene in infection prevention education plans

Healthcare providers should clean their hands as many as 100 times per 12-hour shift, depending upon the number of patients/residents and intensity of care. ABHR is the preferred method over soap and water because it¹:

- Increases compliance among healthcare workers
- More effective at killing microbes
- Requires less time
- More accessible than handwashing sinks
- Improves skin condition with less irritation and dryness than soap and water

Frequently Asked Questions about ABHR

What is hand hygiene?

[Hand hygiene](#) simply means cleaning your hands! This could be achieved through handwashing with soap and water, an antiseptic hand wash, antiseptic hand rub (e.g., ABHR including foam or gel), or surgical hand antisepsis.²

Where can I find information on competency-based training?

CDC [definitions](#) have been developed to assist with implementing competency-based training, auditing, and feedback elements of an Infection Prevention and Control program.³ Refer to the NJDOH [Infection Prevention & Control: Observational Audit vs. Competency Assessment](#) resource.

Where should ABHR be available in healthcare facilities?

ABHR should be readily accessible and placed in appropriate locations. Consider the following locations to improve hand hygiene adherence by healthcare personnel:

- Entrances to patient/resident rooms,
- At the bedside (as appropriate for the patient/resident population),
- Handy, pocket-sized containers for healthcare personnel,
- Staff workstations
- Clean and Soiled Utility Storage, and
- Other convenient locations

How do I protect vulnerable patients/residents who could ingest ABHR?

Each facility will need to determine which patients/residents are at risk for ABHR ingestion. But don't let that stop you from maintaining readily accessible ABHR for staff—Infections are important to prevent, too! In secured units, one option is for HCWs to carry individual pocket-sized containers of ABHR on their person.⁴

How many times can staff use ABHR?

Generally, there is no limit to how often ABHR can be used. If hands feel uncomfortable from the ABHR, handwashing should be performed.¹

Will overuse of ABHR cause microorganism resistance?

No! According to the World Health Organization, there is no reported resistance to ABHR in any microorganism. Appropriate use of ABHR can reduce the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.⁴

Are there certain situations where hand washing should be used instead of ABHR?

Yes. Washing with soap and water should be done in these situations²:

- When hands are visibly dirty,
- Before eating,
- After using a restroom,
- After caring for a person with known or suspected infection during outbreaks of *C. diff* and norovirus.

What are the safety requirements for ABHR?

CMS adopted adherence to the National Fire Protection Association Life Safety Code 101 as a minimum fire safety requirement for facilities that receive Medicaid or Medicare reimbursement. The Life Safety Code contains national standards for the storage of ABHR and the placement and function of dispensers. The CDC addresses safety requirements in the [Clinical Safety: Hand Hygiene for Healthcare Workers](#)².

Please direct any further questions to the ICAR Unit e-mail at CDS.ICAR@doh.nj.gov or via phone at 609-826-5964.

References

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024, February 27). About Hand Hygiene for Patients in Healthcare Settings. Retrieved May 21, 2024, from <https://www.cdc.gov/clean-hands/about/hand-hygiene-for-healthcare.html>.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024, February 27). Clinical Safety: Hand Hygiene for Healthcare Workers. Retrieved May 21, 2024 from <https://www.cdc.gov/clean-hands/hcp/clinical-safety/>.

³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024, April 16). Infection Control Assessment and Response (ICAR) Tool for General Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Across Settings. Retrieved May 21, 2024, from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthcare-associated-infections/php/toolkit/icar.html>.

⁴World Health Organization (2020, November 10). Alcohol-based Handrub Risks and Hazards. Retrieved May 21, 2024, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/alcohol-based-handrub-risks-hazards>.