



# NL Health Services

Infection Prevention and Control

## FACT SHEET

# Hand Hygiene



## What is Hand Hygiene?

Hand hygiene refers to washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub. Washing your hands helps to physically remove the germs by friction. Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) kills 99.99% of most common germs that may cause illness. Hand hygiene is the best way to stop the spread of germs. Germs can live on your hands and/or objects and unwashed hands can spread infections.

## When should you wash your hands?

- When entering or leaving a client's room.
- Before putting on and after removing gloves.
- Before and after providing direct client care.
- After touching raw meats like chicken or beef.
- When your hands are visibly dirty.
- After changing infant or adult diapers.
- After touching animals and pets.
- After contact with any bodily fluids.
- After blowing your nose.
- Before preparing food and eating.
- After using the washroom.

## What about fingernails, nail polish, and jewelry?

- Thousands of germs can survive under and around fingernails. Be sure to clean areas under fingernails if they are visibly dirty.
- Individuals with artificial nails/nail polish will have more germs under and around their nails.
- Hand/arm jewelry and nail enhancements/artificial nails can trap germs and prevent removal during hand hygiene.

## How to wash your hands with soap and water

Use this method of hand hygiene when the hands are visibly soiled.

1. Roll up sleeves and remove jewelry.
2. Wet hands with warm water.
3. Apply soap to hands.
4. Rub vigorously together for 15-30 seconds.
5. Cover all surfaces of the hands, between the fingers, and around the thumbs.
6. Rinse hands well to remove soap residue.
7. Pat hands dry with a paper towel.
8. Use paper towel to turn off tap.
9. Dispose paper towel in the garbage bin.

## How to clean your hands with ABHR

Alcohol based hand rub is a hand disinfectant that must contain 70-90% alcohol.

1. Apply 1 pump of alcohol-based hand rub to palm of one hand.
2. Rub hands together.
3. Spread hand rub thoroughly over hands, as you would if you were washing them.
4. Rub until hands are dry.

**Unless otherwise advised by your health care provider or if hands are visibly dirty, ABHR is the preferred method of Hand Hygiene.**