

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Four Moments of Hand Hygiene

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Introduction

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) were developed based on content from the [Provincial Infectious Disease Advisory Committee's \(PIDAC\) Best practices for hand hygiene in all health care settings](#).

The four moments of hand hygiene are key indicators of times when health care providers are to clean their hands when providing care or treatment to a patient/resident while working in a care environment. The document provides answers to some of the common questions related to each of the 4 Moments of Hand Hygiene. The target audience for this resource is anyone providing hand hygiene education.

The four moments include:

1. Moment 1: BEFORE first touching the patient/resident or their environment
2. Moment 2: BEFORE aseptic procedures
3. Moment 3: AFTER body fluid exposure risk
4. Moment 4: AFTER touching the patient/resident or their environment

As part of the 4 Moments of Hand Hygiene, an assessment should be done to determine what is considered patient/resident environment and what is considered the health care environment.

The term “patient/resident” in this FAQ also refer to clients receiving health care in other settings.

Patient/Resident Environment

The patient/resident environment includes all the surfaces, objects and belongings that surround the patient/resident. For private rooms, this includes all surfaces and items in the room and the bathroom. For shared rooms, this includes all surfaces and items within the curtained space. Examples of items include side tables, bedding/curtains, private bathroom, walking devices, and chairs.

Health Care Environment

The healthcare environment is the environment beyond the patient/resident area. In a private room this is everything outside the room. In a shared room, this is everything outside of the patient/resident's curtained space.

Moment 1:

Before Touching Patient/Resident or Their Environment

Q1. Do I have to clean my hands when I walk into a patient/resident room to do a wellness check or ask a question but don't touch anything?

For the purposes of the 4 Moments of Hand Hygiene, there is no requirement to clean your hands unless you touch the patient/resident or the patient's/resident's environment. Moment 1 only requires you to clean your hands before you touch the patient/resident or their environment. As long as you don't touch the patient/resident or their environment you don't need to clean your hands.

However, if you need to touch something, you must clean your hands first. For example:

- You need to hand your patient/resident their call bell or move a curtain to see your patient/resident.
- You need to move a walking device to see the patient/resident.

It is always a good practice to clean your hands when entering the room since unplanned touching of the patient/resident or environment may occur.

Q2. Do I need to clean my hands before I touch the patient/resident if I've touched something in their environment such as their bedside table?

No, there is no need to clean your hands again after touching the patient's/resident's environment and then touching the patient/resident to provide care. You should have already cleaned your hands before touching the patient's/resident's environment (moment 1). Moment 1 only applies when initially touching the patient/resident or their environment

Q3. Do I need to clean my hands if I touch the curtain in a room?

In a private room, everything within the room is the patient/resident environment, including the curtain. In a multi-bed room, everything inside the curtain is the patient/resident environment, but the **outside of the curtain** is considered part of the health care environment. For this reason, if you move a curtain to see a patient/resident in a multi-bed room, you must clean your hands prior to touching that patient/resident, or anything within their environment.

Moment 2:

Before Aseptic Procedure

Q4. Do I need to clean my hands before putting on gloves for Moment 2?

Even though you wear gloves when performing aseptic procedures, it's still important to clean your hands before putting on gloves to avoid contaminating the outside of the gloves. This is true for any type of gloves, including regular and sterile gloves.

Moment 3:

After Body Fluid Exposure Risk

Q5. Do I need to clean my hands even if I don't get body fluids on them while doing an activity such as emptying a catheter bag?

Yes. If you perform an activity where there is a risk of body fluid exposure, you need to clean your hands (moment 3), even if you don't think you were exposed, or you were wearing gloves. In fact, you need to clean your hands every time you take off gloves regardless of the activity they were used for! This is because gloves may have imperfections or can be damaged during use and expose your hands to microorganisms. It's also common to accidentally contaminate your hands when taking off gloves.

Moment 4:

After Touching Patient or Their Environment

Q6. Do I need to clean my hands prior to touching a new patient/resident (moment 1) if I just cleaned my hands after my last patient/resident (moment 4)?

No. If you cleaned your hands after touching a patient/resident or their environment and then you immediately move to the next patient/resident or their environment without touching anything in between, then you do not need to clean your hands a second time. This one hand hygiene moment can act as both moment 4 for your first patient/resident, and moment 1 for your next. However, if you touch anything in between the patients/residents, (e.g., record vital signs in the patient/resident chart), you need to clean your hands before touching your next patient/resident or their environment.

Hand Hygiene Technique

Q7. How do I clean my hands?

The gold standard is to use 70 to 90% alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) for hand hygiene in all health care settings. However, if there is visible soiling with dirt, blood, body fluids or other body substances, hands need to be cleaned with soap and water.

Q8. Are my hands clean if the ABHR dries on my hands before 15 seconds is reached?

Proper hand cleaning means you use enough product to rub your hands for 15 seconds. If you find that your hands are dry before rubbing for 15 seconds, you need to use more ABHR, as microorganisms may still be alive on your hands. You can apply more ABHR, and next time try starting with a larger quantity.

Q9. Can long nails, rings, bracelets, watches and jewelry affect hand hygiene?

Yes, long nails and chipped nail polish are difficult to clean, can pierce gloves and can increase the number of germs on your hands. The presence of rings, bracelets and jewelry can interfere with hand hygiene. It is recommended that rings and bracelets not be worn by those with direct contact with a patient/resident.

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