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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Hand Hygiene for Residents and Visitors of Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes

Published: September 2026

Introduction

This document provides hand hygiene information for long-term care home (LTCH) and retirement home (RH) residents and family members or frequent visitors. It can also be used by LTCH and RH staff as an additional support for resident and family educational activities. The questions and answers can be incorporated into resident and family communications, educational presentations, discussions or activities that LTCH and RH are conducting as part of the home's infection prevention and control program.

Your Role

Q1. How can I help infections from spreading in this home?

The main way germs can spread is by hands. Keeping hands clean is the best thing you and the health care team can do to prevent infections from spreading to others in this home. Thousands of times a day, members of the health care team handle or touch items and surfaces that could have harmful germs that you may pick up when touching these items or surfaces. Without good hand cleaning, these germs can spread to residents and cause infection.

Q2. When should I clean my hands?

Think about when you would usually clean your hands at home, such as:

- Before and after eating
- After using the washroom
- After sneezing or coughing

Make sure you clean your hands at these times, and in even more scenarios in the long-term care or retirement home. Examples of other times you want to clean your hands are:

- When entering or leaving the home or resident room
- Before and after helping with meals
- Before and after participating in recreational activities

Follow hand cleaning signs and directions from staff in the home.

Q3. How can I ensure that my hands are clean?

There are two main ways to clean your hands effectively. You can clean your hands by using:

1. **Hand rub** provided by the long-term care or retirement home. Rub the product over all parts of your hands for until it is dry. This should take about 15 seconds.

   Watch How to Hand Rub (http://youtu.be/sDUJ4CAYhpA) to learn more on proper hand rub technique.

2. **Soap and water** using the soap in the dispensers to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds at the sink, and drying hands with paper towel or air dryer. You can ask staff for direction about what sink to use. You should not wash your hands in a resident's private bathroom.

   Watch How to Hand Wash (http://youtu.be/o9hjmqes72I) to learn more on proper hand wash technique.

In some specific scenarios it may not be possible for residents to clean their hands (e.g., during a water shutdown, if mobility limits other ways to clean hands). If you or your family member has difficulty cleaning your hands, please discuss options for support with the care team. An individual plan to enable good hand hygiene may be developed. This may include the use of specific hand hygiene products or having staff assist with hand hygiene.

Q4. What else can I do to help prevent the spread of infections in long-term care and retirement homes?

Hand hygiene, such as keeping your hands clean and cleaning them often, is one of the most important ways to prevent infections in the home. There are other things that families and visitors can also do, like not coming to visit when unwell.

Resources are available to you. For more information and education about safely visiting any health care setting, you can watch the Infection Prevention and Control Tips for Visiting All Health Care Settings video. You can also read the fact sheet on Infection Prevention and Control Tips for Visiting All Health Care Settings for additional information about other ways to prevent infections from spreading. You can also talk to the health care staff at the home.

If you are a visitor to the home and providing direct care to your loved one, please check with staff about additional times you may need to clean your hands.

Health Care Worker's Role

Q5. How can health care workers help to prevent the spread of infections?

Health care workers or members of the health care team clean their hands often to keep residents safe. Health care workers and team play a big role in preventing the spread of infection and are committed to providing clean, safe care. There are important moments when the health care team should clean their hands, such as:

- After touching surfaces or objects in a resident's room and going to another room
- Before and after providing care to residents
- Before and after special procedures, such as giving a needle or eye drops, or assisting with mouth or dental care
- After contact with body fluids, such as blood or urine

To reduce the spread of organisms during shared or group activities, staff, residents, family members and volunteers should clean their hands before beginning and after ending the activity.

Gloves

Q6. Can health care team members, residents or visitors wear gloves as a substitute for hand hygiene?

Wearing gloves is not a substitute for hand cleaning and does not prevent germs from spreading from resident to resident. For this reason, do not expect the health care team to always wear gloves.

There are times when the health care team should wear gloves such as when they are treating open wounds or taking blood. They may also wear gloves when taking care of a resident in isolation as these residents need special care and protection. Once the health care team is finished with a task, they will throw the gloves away and they will clean their hands carefully after using the gloves.

If you are visiting a resident in isolation, you may also have to wear special protection, such as gloves, a mask, or a gown.

Citation

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Hand hygiene for residents and visitors of long-term care and retirement homes. Toronto, ON: King's Printer for Ontario; 2026.

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