

**STOP!**  
*clean your hands*



**ARRÊT!**  
*nettoyez-vous les mains*



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**HOW TO HELP PREVENT  
HEALTHCARE-ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS:**

A PATIENT AND FAMILY GUIDE  
[www.handhygiene.ca](http://www.handhygiene.ca)



safer healthcare  
**now!**

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to offer patients and their loved ones information about how they can help stop the spread of healthcare-associated infections through good hand hygiene.



## WHO CAN I TALK TO IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT HEALTHCARE-ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS?

If you have question or concerns, please talk to your healthcare provider who can direct you to the right person.

## ASK. LISTEN. TALK.

Let's work together to help prevent the spread of infections.

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## CHECKLIST FOR PATIENTS, FAMILIES, AND VISITORS

- Clean your hands before and after touching a patient.
- Patients have the right to ask healthcare workers to clean their hands before caring for them.
- Patients should clean their hands many times during the day, especially after using the washroom and before eating.
- Alcohol-based hand rub is usually better for cleaning your hands than soap and water.
- Staying in a single room will decrease your infection risk.
- Cover your cough, clean your hands and do not visit a sick person if you are feeling unwell.



## SUSAN'S STORY

Susan was admitted to a large hospital for brain surgery. She was worried about picking up an infection and knew that they could be caused by healthcare workers not cleaning their hands between patients. So when she saw that her nurse was about to touch her without cleaning her hands, Susan stopped her and asked her to please do so. To her surprise, the nurse became annoyed, but did clean her hands.

After her surgery, she reminded another healthcare worker about the importance of cleaning his hands but was told that he "...hasn't worried about cleaning his hands for many years and has never gotten sick." She was too tired to point out that one of the main reasons healthcare workers should clean their hands is to protect patients, in addition to protecting themselves.

A week later, Susan's surgical wound became infected.



## WHAT ARE HEALTHCARE-ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS AND “SUPERBUGS?”

Healthcare-associated infections are infections that patients pick up in hospital while receiving care for another reason. Healthcare-associated infections can happen in any healthcare setting.

- These infections may happen because of a procedure, such as surgery, or an intravenous “IV” catheter that can weaken your body’s normal defences against infection.
- These infections can be caused by many different types of bacteria, including some that normally live on your skin and, others that can be picked up in the hospital, like “superbugs.”

“Superbugs” are a collection of different germs such as:

- Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)
- *Clostridium difficile* (“C-difficile”)
- These bacteria got the nickname “superbugs” because they are very resistant to antibiotics and can make people quite sick if they get infected with them.
- “Superbugs” can also be picked up outside of hospitals.

Healthcare-associated infections are common: One out of every 10 patients admitted to hospital will get one.

Healthcare-associated infections can also be very serious: about 12,000 deaths in Canada are caused by these infections each year.

Many healthcare-associated infections can be prevented.



## WHICH IS BETTER... ALCOHOL-BASED HAND RUB OR SOAP AND WATER?

Alcohol-based hand rubs, also called “sanitizers,” are better at removing germs from your hands, they work faster and cause less skin irritation than soap and water washing. For these reasons it is recommended that you use alcohol-based hand rub to clean your hands. Soap and water is only needed if your hands are visibly dirty and especially after using the washroom.

If using alcohol-based hand rub, make sure you rub your hands for about 15-30 seconds until the alcohol is dry, making sure to cover all surfaces of your hands and between your fingers.

For information on how to clean your hands with soap and water, visit [www.handhygiene.ca](http://www.handhygiene.ca).

### Other advice

If you have a cough, make sure to cough into your sleeve or a tissue and then clean your hands to prevent passing on germs to others.

If you are sick with an infection, you should not visit someone who is sick, no matter where they are receiving their care, such as in a hospital, in their home etc.

Patients who stay in private rooms have a lower risk of getting infections than those who stay in multi-bedded rooms. If a patient can stay in a single room, this will offer better protection from infection.

Some patients or their visitors will clean the area around a hospitalized patient by wiping down the bed rails, IV pole, or bedside table with disinfectant (most hospitals have disinfectant wipes for use on the nursing unit). While it is not known how much additional protection this would provide on top of the hospital’s regular housekeeping program, it may help decrease the risk of infection.



## HAND HYGIENE ADVICE FOR PATIENTS, FAMILIES AND VISITORS

Family and visitors can also spread infections to patients without knowing. Since “superbugs” and other germs can live on many surfaces, it is very important that anyone visiting a patient clean their hands before and after touching them.

Since some “superbugs” like *C. difficile* are picked up by hand to mouth contact (when people swallow them), patients should also clean their hands often during the day, especially after using the washroom and before eating.

### It is your right to have safe care

If you are worried about your healthcare worker having unclean hands before caring for you, you have the right to ask them to clean their hands.

- This is not always an easy thing to do, and unfortunately some healthcare workers may not respond well to a reminder. If this happens, the healthcare worker should be reported to their supervisor. Sometimes visitors can help remind healthcare workers if patients find it too difficult to do so.

### Cleaning your own hands

No matter where you are receiving your care, you should get into the habit of washing your hands several times a day, especially after touching things that many other people have touched.

- This is very important if you have a chronic medical problem or a weakened immune system. This will not only help protect you from picking up a “superbug”, but may decrease the risk of picking up respiratory virus infections, like colds and influenza.

For more information on hand hygiene you can visit [www.handhygiene.ca](http://www.handhygiene.ca)



## HOW ARE “SUPERBUGS” SPREAD?

Bacteria and viruses can be spread from person to person in the hospital in different ways. “Superbugs,” and most other bacteria and viruses are usually spread between patients on pieces of equipment and on unwashed hands. “Superbugs” can live outside of the body and on equipment for months, so it is easy for things like bedside curtains, tables, and telephones to become contaminated.

The spread of “superbugs” can also happen outside of the hospital, in places like clinics, long term care facilities, and even in the community (outside of healthcare settings). For example, MRSA has been shown to spread in fitness clubs. In these settings, “superbugs,” are still spread by unwashed hands or on pieces of equipment or furniture.



## HOW CAN HEALTHCARE-ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS BE PREVENTED?

Healthcare workers, patients, family, friends and visitors all have a role to play in preventing healthcare-associated infections.



## HAND HYGIENE

Hand hygiene is one of the most important ways to stop the spread of “superbugs” and other organisms. It has been shown that healthcare workers clean their hands about 40% of the time that they are supposed to. With the growing awareness of healthcare-associated infections this number is getting better, but it is still less than ideal.



## HAND HYGIENE CONTINUED

The four best times or “moments” for healthcare workers to clean their hands are:

1. **BEFORE patient contact or contact with the patient’s environment:** Healthcare workers should clean their hands just before they touch you or, before they touch something in your immediate environment, like your bed.
2. **BEFORE doing a procedure:** Prior to doing a procedure such as starting an intravenous “IV” line or putting in a catheter healthcare workers should clean their hands. Even though healthcare workers should put on a pair of gloves to do these things, they still need to clean their hands before putting them on and then again after taking them off.
3. **AFTER contact with a body fluid:** Healthcare workers should wear gloves if they think they might touch body fluids and, they should clean their hands before putting on and after taking off gloves.
4. **AFTER patient contact or contact with the patient’s environment:** Once a healthcare worker is finished caring for you and leaves your bedside, he or she needs to clean their hands.

These 4 moments of hand hygiene are the same in a hospital, in your home, in a clinic or, wherever you are receiving your care.

