



Hand hygiene advice for patients and visitors

The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust takes infection prevention and control very seriously. This leaflet explains why hand hygiene is so important in preventing the spread of infection and gives advice on how to wash your hands properly.

Why is it important to have clean hands?

Hand washing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of many infections, particularly in a healthcare environment when patients may be very ill and vulnerable to picking up infections.

Patients in hospital are more likely to have an opening for an infection to get into the body, such as through a surgical wound or tube like a urinary catheter or intravenous drip.

In most instances, the best way to protect patients and yourselves is to use the alcohol hand rub provided at the ward entrance when entering and leaving the ward. However, in cases of *Clostridioides difficile*, or if there is viral diarrhoea and vomiting on the ward, you will be asked to wash your hands with soap and water. At times, portable sinks will be located just inside the ward entrances to make this easier.

Staff may also make specific requests such as asking you not to sit on beds or occasionally asking you to wear a disposable apron.

You should clean your hands

- Before entering or leaving a patient ward area.
- Before and after any contact with a patient.
- After each visit to the toilet.
- Before every meal.
- Before assisting someone with their food.
- Before handling, preparing or serving food.
- Before and after using any medical equipment or facilities such as a commode.
- After coughing or sneezing into the hands.
- When the hands are visibly soiled.



How to wash your hands

It is important that hand washing is carried out correctly to prevent the spread of infection.

You should wet your hands first with warm water, and then apply liquid/foam soap. Rub hands together thoroughly, paying particular attention to the backs of the hands, go up the wrist area,

in between fingers, finger nail beds and thumbs – these areas are commonly missed. Make sure that you dry your hands thoroughly.

Please ask our staff

Although we train our staff about the importance of hand hygiene, they are sometimes very busy. If you think a member of staff may have forgotten to clean their hands before touching you or your relative, or something used in your care, such as medicines or equipment, please remind them – staff will not mind being reminded of the importance of hand washing.

Soap and water

If you have access to a hand basin, using soap and water is a very effective way of removing micro-organisms from your hands and helping to prevent the spread of infection.

Please tell the staff if there is no soap or hand towels available in the toilet or bathrooms. Please tell the staff if the hand basin, toilet or bathroom is dirty.

Alcohol hand rub

This is a good option if you do not have access to a hand basin. It is effective in killing most micro-organisms on your hands and is easy to use, even on sensitive skin.

Hand rub dispensers should be on every bedside and at the entrance to every ward and department. Please tell the staff if the dispenser needs topping up.

Contact us

If you think there is anything missing from this leaflet or if you have any suggestions that could help us reduce or prevent infections, please call us on 0118 322 6914, e-mail us at infection.control@royalberkshire.nhs.uk or write to us at:

Infection Control Team

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More infection control leaflets can be found on our website, visit <https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/leaflets>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Simon Wells, RBFT Infection Prevention & Control, November 2024

Next review due: November 2026