



RODNEY SURGICAL CENTRE

Hand hygiene for consumers

Background

Everyone has germs. Our bodies are covered with germs that help us to stay healthy. In addition to the germs usually present in our skin (resident germs) we also pick up germs from contact with other persons or objects (transient germs). These are much easier to pick up and transfer, and they can cause you or others to get sick. Although germs are spread through the air, they are most easily spread through **hand contact**. One of the best ways to stop the spread of germs is **hand hygiene**.

Your skin

The skin is a barrier to protect the body from exposure to harmful irritants and disease-causing germs. Healthy skin is 'intact' skin. This means the skin is free from nicks, cuts, scrapes, cracks, and rashes. Skin damage decreases the skin's ability to act as a protective barrier. Dry skin is susceptible to damage.

The biggest contributing factor to dry skin is the cold weather. Other factors that contribute to dry skin include living in places that have low humidity levels, being over age 30, having poor nutrition, some medications and some medical conditions.

It is important to prevent dry skin. Germs can attach more easily to dry skin, and open areas may allow entry of germs into our bodies.

When to wash your hands

You should wash with soap and water:

- when the hands are visibly dirty
- before you eat
- before you prepare food items
- after touching raw meats like chicken or beef
- after contact with any body fluids like blood, urine or vomit
- after changing infant or adult diapers
- after touching animals and pets
- after using the restroom
- after removing medical gloves.

How to wash your hands

- Wet hands with water.
- Apply soap.
- Rub hands vigorously for 15 seconds.
- Rinse well.
- Dry hands with soft paper towels.

When to use alcohol handrubs

- For routine cleaning of hands anytime they are not visibly dirty.
- If you have contact with contaminated objects in the environment.
- Before and after you care for or have contact with someone who is very sick, very old or very young.
- After touching other persons' intact skin (shaking hands, holding hands), especially when the other person has a cold or other illness.
- Whenever you want to decontaminate hands.