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What's New in the Patient Safety World

April 2023

New Handwashing Guidelines

Washing your hands is one of the most fundamental patient safety interventions. But it is also one of the most abused or neglected practices in real life in most healthcare settings.

The 3 most prominent infection control societies, Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA), Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), and Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC), in collaboration with the American Hospital Association, and The Joint Commission recently updated guidelines for hand hygiene, the first update in almost 10 years. They cite the incredulous statistic that "**only 7% of healthcare personnel effectively clean the entire surface of their hands**" (thumbs and fingertips were most frequently missed).

The updated guidelines stress proper technique for hand hygiene, proper use of sanitizers, proper use of gloves, and ways to monitor compliance with best practices. They also suggest where facilities should place and how they should maintain alcohol-based sanitizer dispensers. There is also a section on sinks, faucets, and drains.

There is quite a focus on **fingernails**. The guidance leaves specific policies about nail polish, gels, shellac, and artificial nail extenders to the discretion of infection prevention programs at each facility, with the exception of policies for those who scrub for surgery or work in high-risk areas. Those personnel should maintain short, natural fingernails free of polish and nail extenders.

The guidelines emphasize that **alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers** should always be widely available and never prohibited, even in situations when washing with soap and water are indicated. When healthcare personnel suspect organisms that are difficult to remove, such as C. difficile and noroviruses, healthcare personnel should wear gloves and follow structured techniques for hand washing and hand sanitizing.

At sinks, disposable or single-use towels should be provided to dry hands. Hot air hand dryers should be avoided in patient care areas.

They discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the various methods of **monitoring hand hygiene**. These methods include direct overt observation, direct covert observation, automated hand hygiene monitoring systems, remote video observation, patient as observer, indirect measures (such as product usage and event counting), and audits of accessibility and functionality of supplies.

This is a really comprehensive document that you need to review in detail.

Some of our other columns on handwashing and hand hygiene:

January 5, 2010	"How's Your Hand Hygiene?"
December 28, 2010	"HAI's: Looking In All The Wrong Places"
May 24, 2011	"Hand Hygiene Resources"
October 2011	"Another Unintended Consequence of Hand Hygiene Device?"
March 2012	"Smile…You're on Candid Camera"
August 2012	"Anesthesiology and Surgical Infections"
October 2013	"HAI's: Costs, WHO Hand Hygiene, etc."
November 18, 2014	"Handwashing Fades at End of Shift, ?Smartwatch to the Rescue"
January 20, 2015	"He Didn't Wash His Hands After What!"
September 2015	"APIC's New Guide to Hand Hygiene Programs"
November 2015	"Hand Hygiene: Paradoxical Solution?"
April 2016	"Nudge: An Example for Hand Hygiene"
August 2016	"Hand Hygiene: Who's Watching? Does it Matter?"
September 2016	"More on Preventing HAI's"
July 18, 2017	"Another Hazard from Alcohol-Based Hand Gels"
February 2019	"Infection Prevention for Anesthesiologists"
March 2019	"Does Surgical Gowning Technique Matter?"
December 2020	"Do You Have These Infection Control Vulnerabilities?"
May 2021	"Another Hands-Free Unintended Consequence"
July 27, 2021	"Sustainability"

References:

Glowicz J, Landon E, Sickbert-Bennett E, et al. SHEA/IDSA/APIC Practice Recommendation: Strategies to prevent healthcare-associated infections through hand hygiene: 2022 Update. Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology 2023; 1-22 Published online February 8, 2023
https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/infection-control-and-hospital-epidemiology/article/sheaidsaapic-practice-recommendation-strategies-to-prevent-healthcareassociated-infections-through-hand-hygiene-2022-update/FCD05235C79DC57F0E7F54D7EC314C2C



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