

WHO Hand Hygiene Method: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the primary methods of hand hygiene as recommended by WHO?

The WHO recommends three main methods for hand hygiene in healthcare settings:

- **Hand Rub:** Using an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) to disinfect hands.
- **Hand Wash:** Washing hands with soap and water.
- **Hand Scrub:** A more thorough hand-cleansing method, often performed pre-surgical or in high-risk settings.

2. When should I use an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) instead of washing with soap and water?

Use an ABHR in the following situations:

- Before and after direct patient contact.
- Before handling an invasive device (even if gloves are used).
- After contact with body fluids or excretions (if hands are not visibly soiled).
- After touching surfaces in patient surroundings.

Note: Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty or after suspected exposure to certain pathogens (e.g., C. difficile, norovirus).

3. How do I perform hand hygiene using an alcohol-based hand rub?

- **Step 1:** Apply a palmful of ABHR (about 3-5 ml) to cover all hand surfaces.
- **Step 2:** Rub hands palm-to-palm.
- **Step 3:** Rub the back of each hand with the palm of the other hand, interlacing fingers.
- **Step 4:** Rub palm to palm with fingers interlocked.
- **Step 5:** Rub the back of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked.
- **Step 6:** Rotate thumbs in the opposite palm.
- **Step 7:** Rub each wrist with the opposite hand.
- **Duration:** Continue until hands are dry (about 20-30 seconds).

4. What is the correct hand washing technique using soap and water?

- **Step 1:** Wet hands with water.
- **Step 2:** Apply enough soap to cover all surfaces.
- **Step 3:** Rub hands palm-to-palm.
- **Step 4:** Rub the back of each hand with fingers interlocked.

- **Step 5:** Rub palm to palm with fingers interlocked.
- **Step 6:** Rub each thumb clasped in the opposite palm.
- **Step 7:** Rub the tips of fingers in the opposite palm.
- **Step 8:** Rinse thoroughly with water.
- **Step 9:** Dry with a clean towel or air dry.
- **Duration:** At least 40-60 seconds.

5. What is hand scrubbing, and when should it be performed?

Hand scrubbing is a surgical hand preparation technique. It is more comprehensive than hand rub or hand wash and is generally performed before surgery or other aseptic procedures.

Technique:

- Remove any jewelry or accessories.
- Clean under nails using a disposable nail pick.
- Perform a 2-3 minute scrub, cleaning each finger, palm, and back of the hand up to the elbows.
- Rinse under running water and dry with a sterile towel.

6. What are the "5 Moments for Hand Hygiene" according to WHO?

WHO emphasizes these five key moments for hand hygiene:

- Before touching a patient.
- Before clean/aseptic procedures.
- After body fluid exposure/risk.
- After touching a patient.
- After touching patient surroundings.

7. How much time should be spent on each hand hygiene technique?

- **Hand Rub:** 20-30 seconds until the product dries on the skin.
- **Hand Wash:** 40-60 seconds with soap and water.
- **Hand Scrub:** 2-3 minutes or as per hospital protocol, especially before surgery.

8. Why is the correct technique important in hand hygiene?

Correct technique ensures that all hand surfaces, including commonly missed areas (such as thumbs, fingertips, and between fingers), are effectively disinfected, minimizing the risk of pathogen transmission.

9. What should be done if hands are heavily soiled or contaminated with protein-rich material?

In such cases, **hand washing with soap and water** is recommended rather than an alcohol-based hand rub.

10. Are gloves a substitute for hand hygiene?

No. Gloves provide a protective barrier but can become contaminated themselves. Hand hygiene should be performed before putting on gloves and after removing them.

11. What are the common mistakes in hand hygiene?

Common mistakes include:

- Insufficient coverage of all hand areas.
- Shorter than recommended duration.
- Not performing hand hygiene at the correct times.
- Using ABHR on visibly soiled hands instead of washing with soap and water.