

THE COST OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES

When a client who is free of infection develops an infectious disease after being cared for by healthcare workers, it is said to be a "healthcare associated infection, or HAI for short.

- Hand washing is the single most important activity in health care settings that can *prevent* the spread of dangerous HAI's, like those mentioned on page 4.
- Paying close attention to basic hand hygiene has the potential to reduce the nation's health care debt by billions of dollars.
- The CDC estimates there are 1.7 million health care associated infections each year and nearly 100,000 people die from complications of those infections.
- It is estimated that the cost of treating patients with HAI's is at least \$20 billion a year.
- On average, a hospital charge for patients without an HAI is \$33,260. The average hospital charge for a patient with an HAI is \$175,964 and the average length of stay increase by 5 times.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services no longer make payments for the treatment of eight hospital-acquired conditions, including some types of healthcare associated infections.

In addition to not receiving reimbursement from Medicare for these situations, healthcare providers are not allowed to seek payment from the client or family, either!

So, who is paying for this? If you think that because you have never been directly billed that you are not paying . . . think again!

- As a society, we pay for these infections through increased insurance premiums, staggering medical costs and tax raises.
- We all suffer when small community hospitals close because they can no longer afford to operate.
- Nurses and Aides suffer when there is not enough money to offer our hardest workers a decent wage or an occasional pay raise.
- Clients suffer when employers can no longer afford to staff facilities appropriately, leaving everyone overworked and stretched to the limit!



TIME TO LAUGH!

Getting sick from germs is NOT funny, but here are a few silly jokes to make you giggle!

Scientists say that 90% of all one dollar bills carry germs. Not true! Even a germ can't live on a buck these days.

Q: What do you get if you cross a comedian with germs?

A: Sick jokes!

Q: Did you hear the story about the germ?

A: Never mind. I don't want it spread all over!

"If a doctor treats your cold, it will go away in fourteen days. If you leave it alone, it will go away in two weeks."

~ Gloria Silverstein



FIVE KEY POINTS!

REVIEW WHAT YOU LEARNED!

1. Each year, at least 1.7 million people get sick from germs that are spread by the hands of healthcare workers.
2. The CDC recommends healthcare workers wash their hands for at least 15 seconds. But washing with soap for *30 seconds* gets rid of ten times more bacteria.
3. While they are important infection control measures, gloves and waterless hand sanitizers should never take the place of proper hand washing.
4. Germs on your hands aren't just harmful to your clients. They can make you sick, too!
5. Hand washing remains the single most important measure for stopping the spread of infection.

WHAT'S STOPPING YOU?

Statistics show that fewer than half of all healthcare workers wash their hands as often as they should.

There are many reasons health care workers give for not washing their hands before and after patient care. Here are a few:

- **Skin Irritation.** The hand cleaners are harsh and damage the skin.
- **Supplies are not available.** Sinks are not conveniently located or are not stocked with soaps and towels.
- **Urgent or emergency care.** The client needs immediate care, there is no time to wash hands.
- **Wearing of gloves.** The belief that if gloves were worn, hands do not have to be washed after client care.
- **Not enough time.** High workload and understaffing.
- **Hand hygiene interferes with health-care worker relationships with patients.** There are those who mistakenly believe that a client will feel insulted if the healthcare worker goes right to the sink to wash her hands after touching the client.
- **Low risk of acquiring infection from certain patients.** A false sense of security may lead some healthcare workers to believe that if a client doesn't seem sick, there is no need to wash hands after care.
- **Lack of knowledge of guidelines or protocols.** When the guidelines are unclear, absent or misunderstood, people are left to make assumptions. And, you know what happens when you assume!
- **Not thinking about it/forgetfulness.** You have so much to think about and do during the day. It's easy to let this one step slip your mind.
- **Skepticism regarding the value of hand hygiene.** The problem with germs is that you can't actually SEE them on your hands. When you can't SEE a problem, it's hard to believe you need to do something about it.
- **Lack of proof of the positive impact of hand hygiene on healthcare associated infection rates.** Some people just need to see the proof. If you need proof, go to www.cdc.gov and type "hand hygiene" in the search box. Click around the site. You will find proof in everything you read.



FINAL HAND WASHING DO'S AND DON'TS

There are many hidden dangers when you wash your hands. Here are a few things to watch out for during your workday!

DO:

- Make sure to wash the entire surface area of your hands and wrists. Many people forget to wash the tops of their hands. This skin is more sensitive than the palms of your hands, so be sure to get it clean without rubbing too hard!
- Remove all jewelry and/or watches before washing your hands. If you don't, microorganisms can hide under your jewelry and then be free to contaminate your clients!
- Make sure to clean underneath your fingernails, and to remove all debris. This area of the finger is one of the areas most responsible for spreading infections.
- Wipe down any soiled counters or stove tops if you cook for your client. Diseases can thrive on uncooked food, and can transfer from food to counters, then to your hands. Make sure to use a strong disinfectant spray, and not just a wet paper towel.
- Encourage your client to wash their hands on a regular basis, if they are able. If your client keeps up with their own hygiene, it is less likely that they will become sick.
- Try to tidy up a client's area. Keeping surfaces as clean as possible can help get rid of those tiny bacteria all over their house and/or personal space.

DON'T:

- Wear the same pair of gloves when treating a different client, even if they are washed or rinsed. Gloves can easily carry illnesses from client to client.
- Skip drying your hands after you wash them. Much of the bacteria is removed by the heat of a dryer, or they are simply wiped off with a dry towel. If you only shake your hands in the air, it is likely that there are still lots of tiny microorganisms all over your hands.
- Use a community towel in the restroom. Who knows what type of germs call that towel home!
- Directly touch the sink at any time while washing your hands. Use a dry towel to turn the faucet on and off.
- Touch your eyes, nose or mouth after washing your hands.
- Use a damp cloth to take excess water off your hands. Bacteria thrives in warm, damp places, such as a wash cloth.
- Touch or examine a client without washing your hands first. Hands should be washed immediately before you come into contact with a client, and again immediately after.



WHAT I KNOW NOW!

Now that you've read this inservice on hand washing, jot down a couple of things you learned that you didn't know before.
