

## **Your Skin**

The skin is a barrier to protect the body from exposure to harmful irritants and disease-causing bacteria. Healthy skin is intact skin. This means the skin is free from cuts, scrapes, cracks and rashes. Skin damage decreases the skin's ability to act as protective barriers. 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 locations that have low humidity levels, being over age 30, having poor nutrition or dietary needs that are not met, some medications, some medical conditions, and exposure to irritating chemicals.

It is important to prevent dry skin. Bacteria can attach more easily to dry skin, and open areas may allow entry of germs into our bodies. In spite of many factors beyond our control, some choices may help to keep our skin barrier intact.

Wash hands with warm, not hot water.

Pat skin dry, rather than rubbing

Avoid leaving soap on hand, as it dries the skin.

Wear gloves and warm clothing when it is cold.

## **A Note About Fingernails**

Thousands of germs can survive under and around fingernails. Be sure to clean areas under fingernails if they are visible dirty, and pay special attention to these areas when you wash or use alcohol hand rubs for cleaning hands. Freshly applied nail polish does not increase the number of germs present, but chipped nail polish may harbour germs. Persons with artificial nails are more likely to have more germs under and around nails than those who do not wear them.



## **PHLB-SURVEILLANCE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF INFECTION**

### **GOOD HEALTH IS IN YOUR HANDS**



**Making your health care  
Safer!**

## Overview

Everyone has bacteria. Our bodies are covered with bacteria that help us to stay healthy. In addition to the bacteria that are usually present on our skin, we also pick up bacteria from contact with other persons or objects in the environment. These types of bacteria, called Transient bacteria, are much easier to pick up and transfer. In this way, they can cause you, or others, to get sick.

Although people usually think that germs are spread through the air, the fact is that are more easily spread **through hand contact**.

One of the best ways to stop the spread of germs is to wash or decontaminate your hands. **Hand Hygiene** is the newest term to describe washing or decontaminating hands.

**Washing hands** helps to physically remove bacteria by friction, and to rinse them down the drain

**Decontaminating hands** reduces the amount of bacteria present on your hands through use of special alcohol-containing preparation (hand rubs), in the form of gels, rinse or foams.

While alcohol-containing preparations reduce germs on your hands, they can not remove visible soil or contamination. It is always important to **Wash** hands any time they are visible dirty.

## Your 4 Moments for Hand Hygiene.



Source: Illustration from:  
[www.justcleanyourhands.ca](http://www.justcleanyourhands.ca)

### When to Wash Your Hands

Before initial patient/patient environment contact

Before aseptic procedure (s)

After body fluid exposure risk

After patient/patient environment contact

### How to Use Alcohol Hand rubs

Apply the product to palm of one hand, rub hands together.

## When to Use Alcohol Hand rubs

For routine cleaning of hands anytime they are 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 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.

## My Hands are Dry – Won't Alcohol Sting or Make Them Drier?

Choose alcohol hand rubs containing 60-95% alcohol, listed as ingredients isopropyl, ethanol or n-propanol.

Choose alcohol hand rubs with 1 – 3% glycerol or other skin conditioning agents as emollients.

Emollients are added to alcohol hand rubs to restore moisture to the skin.

It is NOT necessary, or recommended, to routinely wash hands after application of alcohol-based hand rubs.

**Clean care is safer Care!**