

The Safe Patient

An educational patient safety series with free downloadable brochures,
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Safe Care in the Hospital: Proper Hand Hygiene and How it Can Prevent Dangerous Infections

Every year in the United States, more people die from preventable infections they actually catch from their medical care than from Breast Cancer, car accidents, and AIDS combined.

- **Here's how you can protect yourself or your patient while receiving medical care.**
- **Hands are the main way that we move bacteria from one place to another. And that's why hand washing is so important.** If we do a good job of washing our hands, we can break the chain of transmission; we can stop carrying bacteria from one place to the next.
- **To sanitize your hands properly,** the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends **using an alcohol based hand sanitizer.** Make sure your sanitizer contains at least 60% alcohol. **But washing your hands with soap and water works too.**
- With the alcohol foam or the alcohol gel products, you put the squirt on your hands and you use the friction to rub your hands very well. All sides of the front and back and in between the fingers, it takes about 15 seconds to do that. With soap and water, you want to rinse your hands under the water, apply the soap, sing "Happy Birthday" to yourself twice, and the amount of time that it takes you to do that is about 20 - 30 seconds.
- Also **all visitors and health care professionals must wash or sanitize their hands before and after they enter your room. Everyone; even your own physician.** If you don't see them do it, ask them. Say, "Can you just wash your hands in front of me before you touch me?" That's very, very important. **Don't be embarrassed or shy about it; it's the most basic of safe care practices. Being vigilant about something proper hand hygiene can actually save your patient's life.**

