

# Hand hygiene for mental health workers

Good hand hygiene protects you and the consumers you work with.



## What is hand hygiene?

Hand hygiene means keeping your hands clean. You can do this by washing your hands with soap and water or rubbing your hands with sanitiser to remove the microorganisms that cause infection or disease.

## How do I perform hand hygiene?

If your hands are visibly dirty or if you have had contact with infectious agents, such as *Clostridioides difficile* or norovirus, always wash them with soap and water.

As you may not be able to see the germs on your hands, you can also use a hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol.

## Why is hand hygiene important?

Microorganisms that cause infections, such as colds, flu, COVID-19 and gastroenteritis, can be on surfaces and equipment. When you touch these surfaces, microorganisms can get on your hands and you can pass infectious agents on to other people or surfaces.

It is important that mental health workers perform hand hygiene correctly, and promote hand hygiene among mental health consumers. This will assist in providing a clean and safe environment wherever care is provided – including in a mental health unit, a community clinic or a home.



## 5 Moments for hand hygiene

There are **5 critical moments** in care where there is an increased risk of spreading infection. These are:

- 1. Before touching a consumer.** Do hand hygiene before entering a care area and having direct physical contact with a consumer.
- 2. Before a procedure.** Do hand hygiene immediately before any procedure, including giving oral or parenteral medications, inserting an IV line, or preparing a consumer for electroconvulsive therapy.
- 3. After a procedure or exposure to blood or body fluids.** Do hand hygiene after all clinical procedures. For example: after giving medications, disposal of sharps, handling soiled linen, providing wound care, or touching invasive devices.
- 4. After touching a consumer.** Do hand hygiene after physical contact with a consumer. This may include on leaving the consumer's room, home, or other area where care is provided.
- 5. After touching the consumer's surroundings.** Do hand hygiene after touching any equipment, furniture, furnishings, or other items in the area where care is provided to the consumer.

### Caution with sanitiser

Sanitiser containing 60–80% (v/v) ethanol or equivalent should be used for all routine hand hygiene practices in the healthcare environment where safe to do so, based on local risk assessment.

**Swallowing sanitiser is harmful. Carefully consider where you place and store sanitiser.**

## How to use hand sanitiser



## Consumers can learn good hand hygiene from their mental health workers

Encourage consumers to do hand hygiene:

### BEFORE AND AFTER

- Eating
- Attending to personal care.

### BEFORE

- Entering or leaving public places.

### AFTER

- Using the toilet
- Blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing
- Touching an animal, animal food, or animal waste
- Touching rubbish.



**NHHI**  
National Hand Hygiene Initiative

### For more information

Visit the **National Hand Hygiene Initiative** at [www.safetyandquality.gov.au/nhhi](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/nhhi)