



Prevention Experts Stress Importance of Hand Hygiene Compliance

In light of the March 25, 2005 decision by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to allow alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers in egress corridors, the infection prevention community has come together to stress the importance of hand hygiene among healthcare workers and consumers. Despite the fact that hand hygiene remains the most simple and effective means of reducing the transmission of germs, many clinicians do not consistently follow hand hygiene recommendations, such as those issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/

Prevention is everyone's business – that of healthcare providers, administrators and patients. Infection prevention experts recognize that this recent change in regulations provides still further opportunity to remind everyone about the importance of hand hygiene either by the traditional soap and water method or by the use of alcohol based hand sanitizers. APIC and other organizations collaborated with the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) last year to introduce the Speak Up™ initiative, designed to encourage patients to play an active role in their healthcare by asking questions and requesting that their clinicians wash their hands before performing an examination.

How You Can Help:

It will take a concerted and sustained effort to improve overall adherence to hand hygiene, since everyone has a role to play in reducing infections. Remember that we are all “patients-in-waiting” – we never know when we'll be on the receiving end of healthcare.

Healthcare Workers: Please remember to follow hand hygiene recommendations between each and every patient: wash with soap and water if your hands are visibly soiled; otherwise use the alcohol based hand sanitizer for decontaminating hands during patient care. In any instance when a sink is not readily available, please make use of these hand sanitizers. Remember that your patients need reassurance that you have cleaned your hands before seeing them. Do this as you enter the room and tell them what you are doing. Don't leave them to wonder or feel embarrassed by having to ask you first.

Healthcare Administrators: Please lend your voice to the cause. You have the opportunity to help reduce the overall incidence of healthcare-associated infections by urging adherence to this one simple practice. Infection prevention experts cannot achieve this alone; we need your support to ensure proper compliance and availability of products.

Patients: Continue to ask questions, and continue to request that your clinicians clean their hands by either washing with soap & water or using a waterless alcohol based hand sanitizer before touching you or your environment. Make hand washing a habit of everyday life and help your

family members understand the importance of this practice. Remember that you are an equal partner in ensuring your own wellness.

Media: Please help us to stress the importance of hand hygiene to the general public, and that alcohol based hand sanitizers are safe and effective for this purpose. The public voice is a strong one, and we need their support in enhancing efforts to curb the spread of infection.

For more information, visit www.apic.org or www.cdc.gov/cleanhands