

Effective hand washing for homecare workers

Hand washing is vital to reduce the spread of infection between careworkers and service users. Hands should be washed:

1. On arrival in a service user's home, after removing jewellery from the hands and wrists and before putting on latex gloves (or other well-fitting procedure gloves);
2. After removing and disposing of gloves and following any contact with faeces or body fluids such as urine, blood, sweat or secretions from the nose or mouth;
3. Before leaving the service user's home.

Hands should be washed thoroughly using a squirt of a neutral detergent hand wash (or a clean bar of soap if handwash isn't available). The water should be warm and comfortable to the touch, rather than hot.

Hand washing should be performed carefully, but avoid rubbing the hands so vigorously that they become tender with repeated washing. Do not use a nail brush as this can damage the skin and harbour bacteria.

The following seven diagrams show the correct way to wash your hands. Pay special attention to the tips of fingers, the thumbs and the palms of the hands: Tests have shown that these are the areas where bacteria are hardest to remove.

Some people find that applying an unscented hand cream after the last hand wash at each service user's home reduces the risk of their hands becoming dry. Hand creams should be for personal use only, rather than from tube or container used by several people. When outside in cold weather it is also a good idea to wear some well-fitting gloves.



1 Wet the hands with warm water and use a hand-wash to build up a lather.



2 Wash the hands with palms facing and remember to wash between the fingers.



3 Wash the backs of both hands, again remember to wash between each of the fingers.



4 Link the fingers of one hand and continue to wash. Ensure the tips of the fingers are washed.



5 Wash the thumbs of each hand thoroughly using one hand to wash the opposite thumb.



6 Wash the palms of each hand as this is an area often neglected.



Finally, wash the wrists.

The hands are then rinsed thoroughly and dried on disposable paper towels (or on a clean hand towel).