

Sunday 5th May is World Hand Hygiene Day.



World Hand Hygiene Day, celebrated on May 5th, 2024, is an initiative by the World Health Organization aimed at promoting hand hygiene across the globe. This day emphasizes the importance of hand hygiene as a simple, effective, and affordable way to prevent the spread of microorganisms and save lives. The campaign focuses on the role of hand hygiene in healthcare settings, encouraging both healthcare providers and patients to practice good hand hygiene techniques. By highlighting the critical nature of clean hands, Western Health fosters a culture of cleanliness that can significantly improve health outcomes for our patients, staff, and visitors.

Hands play an important part in helping us care for ourselves and others.

With winter fast approaching, cold weather and lower humidity levels mean hands often become drier. It's important to focus on protecting yourself and your patients by maintaining the moisture level of your skin to maintain healthy hands. Intact skin is the first line of defence against infection. Dry, damaged and cracked skin can put you at risk of picking up germs and spreading them to others. It can also lead to discomfort and reduced compliance with hand hygiene.

Factors that effect skin moisture and cause irritation

1. Repeated handwashing with soap and water

Handwashing strips oil from the surface of the skin making it less pliable and more likely to crack or tear.

2. Using hot water for washing and vigorous drying with paper towel

Hot water removes moisture and the rough surface of the paper towel is abrasive, stripping away the protective outer layer of skin cells when rubbed vigorously.

3. Donning gloves while hands are still wet

Donning gloves over damp hands increases the risk of skin irritation. Additionally, sweating while wearing gloves for extended periods also increases likely skin irritation and drying.

Top tips to keep skin healthy

1. Prioritise the use of hand rub, minimise hand washing.

It's recommended that you use Alcohol based hand rub (ABHR) if hands are not visibly soiled. ABHR is far more effective at killing germs and protecting your hands than handwashing with soap and water. ABHR contains emollients which hydrate skin and replenish lost oils with studies showing this leads to improvement in skin condition in 70% of workers who report skin irritation and drying. If hand washing is required, avoid the use of hot water, use warm water, wet hands before applying soap, rinse and gently pat dry. Ensure hands are completely dry before donning gloves.

2. Regular use of skin moisturisers both at work and at home.

Hand lotions and creams contain protect hands against drying and chemical irritation preventing skin breakdown. Lotions are light in consistency and easy to use, however frequent applications are required. Creams and ointments are thicker and oilier. These formulations require less frequent application and replenish lost skin oil. Remember to apply moisturiser all over hands and

between fingers. At work, use moisturising lotions that are chemically compatible as hand hygiene products to minimise skin reactions.

Set a routine

At work: Moisturise hands **4 times a shift**; before starting work, when you take a break at morning tea and lunchtime and at the end of your shift. Always moisturise after washing hands when skin is clean and more susceptible to drying out. *Please note: In Central Sterile Supply Department (CSSD), hand creams are not used when performing reprocessing activities.

At Home: Regularly moisturise your hands, and if you develop dryness or dermatitis, consider using clean cotton gloves on top of your moisturiser at night. Avoid exposing hands to detergents and warm water at home. Wear rubber gloves for washing up or in the laundry. Cotton gloves are available at most chemists.

3. Stay hydrated

Maintaining adequate water levels in the skin is crucial for its health, particularly the outermost layer. Dehydration can lead to dry skin. An increased intake of water or the use of a topical hydrator permeates the cells with water and improves the ability of the skin to absorb moisture. Remember to drink plenty of water every day.

Seek Advice

If you develop symptoms including dryness, irritation, itching, cracking, and bleeding notify your direct Manager, Occupational Health and Safety Officer and Infection Prevention department and complete a Riskman. It is important to address these issues early and not leave until skin is split, cracked or weeping.

Infection Prevention will undertake an assessment and may photograph the hands. A skin care questionnaire and assessment form will be completed and an individual plan of action will be developed and discussed with you. Infection Prevention may also provide skin care advice and education.

You may require referral by your GP for dermatology review and possible reassignment of clinical duties until you've been medically cleared. Follow-up will continue with you until the situation is resolved.

Remember: If you cannot perform correct hand hygiene you can't work clinically.

Ecolab will be on site to assess your skin hydration level using a digital skin moisture analyser – All are welcome

Site	Date	Time	Location
Footscray	Friday 3 rd May	1100 - 1230hrs	Opposite volunteer op shop
Sunshine	Friday 3 rd May	1300 - 1430hrs	Outside private pharmacy
Bacchus Marsh	Monday 6 th May	1330 -1430hrs	Main reception
Williamstown	Monday 6 th May	1130 – 1230hrs	Staff café

