

Hand washing – why it's so important



Visiting hospitals or care homes

When visiting a friend or relative in hospital or other environments where healthcare is provided, it is important to ensure that you wash your hands or use an alcohol handrub to help prevent the spread of infection.

Norovirus, also known as winter vomiting disease or gastric flu, is a common form of sickness and diarrhoea which can spread rapidly in any healthcare setting which can result in the temporary closure of hospital wards and care homes. The spread of Norovirus can be prevented by good hand washing.

Carers of vulnerable people

For those people who care for friends or relatives, it is important that hand washing is undertaken properly. This will help to significantly reduce the risk of passing on germs to someone who may be more susceptible to infection.

Children

Parents have a vital role to play as children need to be taught the importance of washing their hands properly. Encouraging children to wash their hands will help to ensure that this practice becomes a lifelong habit.

When you need to wash your hands:

- Before and after preparing food.
- Before meal times.
- After using the toilet or changing nappies.
- Whenever hands are visibly dirty.
- Before and after providing care to a patient/vulnerable person.
- Before and after visiting a healthcare setting.
- After you cough, sneeze or blow your nose.
- After touching pets or their waste.



Facts about hand hygiene and washing hands

- Sickness absence costs employers £495 a year in direct costs for every worker employed. Indirect costs are probably considerably more (Source: CBI)
- Up to half of all men and a quarter of women fail to wash their hands after they've been to the toilet
- We have between 2 and 10 million bacteria between fingertip and elbow
- The number of germs on your fingertips doubles after you use the toilet
- Germs can stay alive on hands for up to three hours

More information, including a short video demonstrating good hand washing, can be found via NHS North Yorkshire and York's website at www.nyypct.nhs.uk

Please note: this is a public-facing campaign, and the hand washing guidance we are giving is not as thorough as that which should be followed by health care professionals.