Handwashing is a simple thing and it’s the best way to prevent infection and illness. Clean hands prevent infections. Keeping hands clean prevents illness at home, at school, and at work. Hand hygiene practices are key prevention tools in healthcare settings.

In healthcare settings, handwashing can prevent potentially fatal infections from spreading from patient to patient and from patient to healthcare worker and vice-versa. The basic rule in the hospital is to cleanse hands before and after each patient contact by either washing hands or using an alcohol-based hand rub.

How to wash hands using soap and water:

- Wash your hands using soap and warm, running water. Wet hands prior to applying soap.
- Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces. Pay attention to the back of hands, wrists, between the fingers and under the fingernails.
- Continue rubbing hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing the alphabet song the whole way through.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry hands using a paper towel. Use the paper towel to turn off the faucet to prevent recontaminating hands.

Always use the soap and water method of hand hygiene:

- After using the restroom
- Before eating
- If hands are visibly soiled

Another hand hygiene alternative is an alcohol-based hand rub to clean hands. Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of germs on skin, are fast acting and easy to use.

When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply product to the palm of one hand.
- Rub hands together.
- Rub the product over all surfaces of hands, fingers, and wrists until hands are dry.

Hands should be cleansed after:

- Any patient contact
- After coughing, sneezing or using the restroom
- Before eating or touching any food
- After handling any soiled equipment or utensils
- After doing anything that would contaminate the hands