

Hand Hygiene Compliance – Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is it so hard for health care professionals to wash their hands?

To be clear, health care providers *are* washing their hands, and it is a practice that continues to improve as we learn more about hand hygiene best practices.

Both hospitals and the government have done considerable amounts of work to improve the access and process challenges that once made hand washing in hospitals less expedient. For example, where sinks used to be located inconveniently throughout hospitals, there is now fast and easy access to alcohol-based hand rubs at patients' bedsides. The MOHLTC's provincial hand hygiene campaign, *Just Clean Your Hands*, which all Ontario hospitals have participated in, was designed in a way that helps hospitals and individuals overcome barriers to proper hand hygiene and to improve compliance with hand hygiene best practices.

2. Is it true that hospital staff aren't washing their hands because they are too busy and over-worked?

No, this is not the case. The MOHLTC's provincial hand hygiene campaign, *Just Clean Your Hands*, was designed in a way that helps hospitals and individuals overcome the barriers to proper hand hygiene and to improve compliance with hand hygiene best practices.

The *Just Clean Your Hands* program recognizes that health care providers are busy and require immediate access to hand hygiene products at the right time in the patient care process. The program supports having alcohol-based hand rub at the point of care to address this barrier and to make it easier and faster for health care providers to clean their hands. This type of system support is critical to sustaining improved hand hygiene compliance.

3. Why do you think the mandatory public reporting of hand hygiene compliance will affect current compliance rates?

There are many factors that will lead to improved hand hygiene compliance. Mandatory public reporting is one element. Certainly, increasing recent attention on the issue, as well as the MOHLTC's multifaceted hand hygiene program, *Just Clean Your Hands*, has reinforced the importance of improving hand hygiene among health care professionals.

4. Why is hand hygiene so important?

As the single most effective way to reduce the spread of infections, hand hygiene is an important practice for health care providers and patients alike.

Effective hand hygiene practices in hospitals plays a key role in improving patient and provider safety. It is a different way of thinking about safety and patient care and involves everyone in the hospital, including patients and health care providers.

5. What steps has your hospital taken to improve hand hygiene compliance?

Leamington District Memorial Hospital has been working on educating and training health care practitioners about hand hygiene for the last year. The Quality Council reviews the requirements and compliance rates.

In addition, there is strong collaboration among Ontario hospitals, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Hospital Association to continually improve system performance, particularly in the area of patient safety.

At a provincial level, hospitals have been:

- participating in the MOHLTC's infection prevention and control core competencies education program;
- using PIDAC's best practice guidance documents;
- are implementing the provincial *Just Clean Your Hands* campaign; and
- attending education sessions held by the OHA and the RICNs on a variety of infection prevention and control topics.

Now with the new public reporting system on a variety of infections, hospitals can trend and eventually benchmark their infection control rates.

Locally, hospitals also collaborate with their Public Health Units and Regional Infection Control Networks (RICNs).

6. How do we know that a hospital is safe?

Patient safety is a number one priority for all Ontario hospitals. There are numerous checks and balances in place to ensure the safety of public hospitals. Ontario's hospitals operate in one of the most demanding health care accountability systems in all of Canada and maintain openness, accountability, and transparency through agencies like Accreditation Canada and initiatives such as Hospital Service Accountability Agreements (HSAAs), past participation in Hospital Report and now – the public reporting of patient safety indicators.

7. What exactly is being publicly reported?

Commencing April 30th, 2009, hospitals will be required to report hand hygiene compliance rates to Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. A provincial audit tool has been provided to hospitals as part of the *Just Clean Your Hands* program. This audit tool captures data on the four essential indicators for when hand hygiene should be performed. Compliance rates will be publicly reported on:

- i. Before Initial Patient/Patient Environment Contact
- ii. After Patient/Patient Environment Contact

Hospitals will be required to submit data on the four indications for hand hygiene; however the MOHLTC will not publicly report data on “before aseptic procedures” and “after body fluid exposure risk” as it is difficult for some hospitals to obtain a large enough sample size for these indications.

Hospitals are required to post, by site, the percent compliance rates for before and after patient/patient environment contact for each period end date on their corporate websites.

Auditors trained using the provincial audit tool and training program have been conducting direct observations of hand hygiene practices in hospitals using the audit tool.

8. What is considered a high rate or low rate?

Currently, hospitals are establishing a baseline for their hand hygiene compliance. As the Auditor General of Ontario noted in his special report on *Prevention and Control of Hospital-associated Infections*, hospitals have been using different processes for measuring hand hygiene compliance and, therefore, their rates have not been comparable. As of April 30th, hospitals will have a formalized baseline in place that all hospitals can use to measure and track their hand hygiene compliance more reliably over time. If a hospital’s rates fall below their baseline, the hospital will be able to look at internal processes, identify areas for improvement, and implement strategies to further improve hand hygiene and, in turn, control and prevent hospital-associated infections.

9. Where can the public access this information?

Each Ontario hospital will have this information available on their website. In addition, the MOHLTC will also report the same information on its website www.ontario.ca/patientsafety.

10. How frequently will you be reporting this information?

Hand hygiene compliance rates will be posted for the public on an annual basis.

However, hospitals all continue to audit their hand hygiene compliance regularly and may, at their discretion, post updates on their website outside of the MOHLTC’s public reporting regime.

11. Did your hospital track hand hygiene compliance before now, and if so, what actions did staff take to minimize the risk posed to the public?

This is the first time there has been a common definition and auditing tool in place. Moving forward, all hospitals will use their baseline data to reliably measure and track their hand hygiene compliance improvement over time. If a hospital’s rates fall below their baseline, the hospital will be able to look at internal processes, identify areas for improvement, and implement strategies to further improve hand hygiene and, in turn, control and prevent hospital-associated infections.

12. Can hospitals compare their hand hygiene compliance rates against other organizations? Why does your hospital's hand hygiene compliance rate compare unfavourably/favourably to hospitals in your city/LHIN?

Hospital care is complicated and depends on many factors.

The public reporting of hospitals' hand hygiene compliance rates is not intended to serve as a measure for hospitals to compare themselves against other organizations, or for the public to use as a measure of where to seek care.

Rates can vary from hospital to hospital, month to month. Some hospitals will have lower observation opportunities because they do not have as much direct provider-to-patient care opportunities. Due to the types and patient populations (i.e. mental health) of these hospitals, their rates may seem lower.

Like other indicators, it is important to look at hand hygiene compliance rates in a broader context. The rates must be examined in order to get a sense of how hospitals are performing – where they excel and where improvements could be made. It is important to look at all of these indicators in combination.

13. What conclusions should patients draw from a low hand hygiene compliance rate? Do low rates mean that patients have a higher risk of catching a hospital-associated infection, like *C. difficile*?

Patients should know that their hospital is safe, that the care they receive is top-notch, and that every effort is made to ensure the highest quality of care possible.

Public reporting of hand hygiene compliance rates is another helpful measure to ensure the care provided to Ontario patients is even safer, and continues to improve over time.

A low compliance rate does not necessarily mean that health care providers are not washing their hands. What the *Just Clean Your Hands* observational audit tool measures is whether health care providers are washing their hands at the right times, and the right way. That is why it is vital that hand hygiene compliance rates are viewed in the context of other performance indicators.

That said, the analysis of these rates, over time, will certainly provide helpful information that can be used to make system improvements in each hospital.

We look forward to working with our health professionals to make those improvements in the time ahead.

14. Does your hospital face consequences if you have you don't collect the target sample size of 200 observed opportunities for every 100 beds?

Each hospital has a sample size that is obtainable based on inpatient bed count. All hospitals should be able to collect the identified sample size. If they don't submit sufficient data the web site will show that data was not provided.

The public reporting of patient safety indicators, including hand hygiene rates, has been mandated by the government to help hospitals improve performance, not penalize them. We expect that ongoing efforts among hospitals will continue to be supported by the government and the OHA, and that hospitals will receive the resources and tools needed to continue to quality and performance improvements.

15. What steps does your hospital need to take if your hand hygiene compliance rates are too low?

If low hand hygiene compliance rates are identified, hospitals will review their infection prevention and control practices to ensure that they align with the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) best practices documents, as well as the *Just Clean Your Hands* program.

Hospitals may also work closely with their local public health units and their Regional Infection Control Networks (RICNs) to identify any further action that is required.

16. In the current economic environment, wouldn't it make more sense to pay less for hospital administration and more for patient safety initiatives?

There is no doubt that hospitals are facing some difficult challenges in managing to live within the current funding envelope, but Ontario's hospitals continue to be focused on providing excellent patient care.

While each hospital is working with its LHIN to develop plans for balancing budgets, it is important to remember that Ontario's hospitals are incredibly complex organizations that employ thousands of people, manage billions of dollars, and provide excellent treatment to millions of Ontarians every year. Ontario taxpayers expect their hospitals to be led by the most experienced, best-qualified people, and these highly-skilled leaders must be compensated at levels appropriate to their education, experience and responsibility.

17. How will hospitals ensure that staff comply with proper hand hygiene practices?

Hospitals are working to create a culture of patient safety involves everyone – health care administration, health care professionals, and, of course, patients and families. If low hand hygiene compliance rates are identified, hospitals will review their infection prevention and control practices to ensure that they align with the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) best practices documents, as well as the *Just Clean Your Hands* program.