

## **Clean Hands Count: Prevent and Control Infections Overview**

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), State Survey Agencies (SA), and Accrediting Organizations (AO) are proud to support the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Clean Hands Count campaign. This collaborative effort aims to improve healthcare provider adherence to hand hygiene (HH) recommendations, address myths and misperceptions about alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR), and empower patients to play a role in their care by asking or reminding healthcare providers to clean their hands. Although there will be no change in HH survey observations or CMS policy, this effort should lead to fewer healthcare acquired infections and improved patient and resident safety.

HH is an expectation not only of the CMS, SAs, and AOs, but also of those being cared for (patients, residents, clients) in every healthcare setting. As a basic tenet of infection control and prevention, CMS expects all Medicare participating healthcare entities to have an infection control and prevention program that includes HH practices, based on national standards or professional organizational guidelines. HH guidelines from the CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend the preferential use of ABHR over soap and water in most clinical situations.<sup>1, 2</sup>

When hands are not visibly soiled and the facility is not experiencing an outbreak of norovirus or C. diff, ABHR is the preferred method of HH for healthcare personnel to clean their hands because it offers the following:<sup>1</sup>

- Is more effective at killing potentially deadly germs on hands than soap
- Requires less time
- Is more accessible than handwashing sinks
- Produces reduced bacterial counts on hands, and
- Improves skin condition with less irritation and dryness than soap and water

This initiative not only supports the CDC “Clean Hands Counts”<sup>3</sup> campaign, but also aligns with other CMS activities as found in the QSO 20-03-NH Memo<sup>4</sup> and the Nursing Home “Head to Toe (H2T)” toolkit.<sup>5</sup> During surveys, CMS, SA, and AO surveyors observe healthcare staff HH practices and use of ABHR. Please be aware that they may be doing the following:

- Observe HH practices
- Review HH procedures (CDC and WHO recommend procedures promoting the preferential use of ABHR)
- Observe whether ABHR is readily available for staff to use to support effective HH
- Document non-compliance related to infection control and prevention, including HH

HH compliance makes a difference in reducing healthcare associated infections. This combined effort of CMS, AOs and SAs reinforces the need for not only effective HH, but also the

importance of access to and use of ABHR as the preferred method of HH for healthcare personnel.

1. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\). Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings](#)
2. [World Health Organization. WHO guidelines on hand hygiene in health care](#)
3. [Clean Hands Count](#)
4. [Quality, Safety and Oversight \(QSO\) memorandum 20-03-NH](#)
5. [Quality, Safety and Oversight \(QSO\) memorandum 20-11-NH](#)

Please note: More on hand hygiene survey activity is forthcoming. Beginning March 4, 2020, in response to the Coronavirus threat, CMS suspended non-emergency survey inspections across the country to allow inspectors to turn their focus on the most serious health and safety threats like infectious diseases and abuse. For State Surveyor and Accrediting Organization updates, please monitor the Coronavirus webpage: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/quality-safety-oversight-general-information/coronavirus>.