

**Statement from the Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC) and the
Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care
Hand Hygiene Compliance and Medical Practitioners**

The Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC) and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) are committed to the prevention and control of infections for the safety of patients, healthcare workers, and the community. In Australia, around 60,000 hospital-acquired complications are related to healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) annually.¹ Many HAIs though are preventable through the use of infection prevention and control strategies.

Washing hands with soap and water, or using alcohol-based hand sanitiser, to remove microorganisms as part of routine healthcare is a fundamental strategy to prevent and control infections. Hand hygiene must be performed at critical points during the provision of health care to prevent the spread of infection to patients and healthcare workers, and to limit contamination of the healthcare environment.

An organisation's hand hygiene compliance rate is an indicator of the quality of its infection prevention and control program. A high compliance rate reflects an organisation that is patient safety-centred and concerned about work health and safety.

The National Hand Hygiene Initiative (NHHI) is part of a suite of Commission actions to prevent and reduce HAIs in Australia. Over 1,000 public and private sector organisations submit data to each of three national hand hygiene audits each year. The NHHI also includes healthcare worker education about hand hygiene and infection prevention and control, and the use of alcohol-based hand sanitiser at the point of care.² The CPMC supports the NHHI, because it is critical to improving the safety of patients, the health workforce, and the community.

How can medical practitioners support effective hand hygiene practice?

Medical practitioners are role models for other healthcare professionals, health students, and the wider community. They also take very seriously their crucial role in ensuring the safety of their patients. CPMC and the Commission ask medical practitioners to support effective hand hygiene practice by:

- Making sure they know and work with the infection prevention and control team in their hospitals
- Knowing what is required for high hand hygiene compliance and understanding how hand hygiene audits work
- Promoting hand hygiene to their patients, their colleagues and the junior doctors and students they supervise
- Working with their infection prevention and control team to develop and deliver hand hygiene and infection prevention and control education
- Participating in hand hygiene compliance audits within their teams and organisations
- Raising awareness and understanding of, and acting in response to, local hand hygiene audit data and other infection prevention and control data (e.g. bloodstream infection and other HAI rates)
- Ensuring morbidity and mortality and departmental meetings include standing agenda items for infection prevention and control.

Together these strategies will embed effective hand hygiene into routine clinical practice.

Hand hygiene is an important aspect of reducing the risk of infection. All clinicians and members of the health workforce should participate in their organisation's programs to prevent and control infections and improve patient safety.

References

1. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. The state of patient safety and quality in Australian hospitals 2019. Sydney; ACSQHC, 2019.
2. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. National Hand Hygiene Initiative Manual. Sydney: ACSQHC; 2019