Hand hygiene and fighting antibiotic resistance go hand-in-hand

Friday 5 May is international Hand Hygiene Day, and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) is joining the World Health Organization to highlight the role that clean hands can play in preserving the effectiveness of antibiotic medicines.

The WHO has chosen to promote this year’s Hand Hygiene Day with the campaign slogan “Fight antibiotic resistance – it’s in your hands”.

Resistance to antibiotics is a growing problem here and overseas. It occurs because bacteria naturally evolve over time to be less susceptible to antibiotics. This is reducing the options doctors have for treating some serious infections. While it is difficult to stop this happening completely, bacteria can develop resistance much faster if poor hygiene allows infections to spread.

Hand cleaning – either with soap and water, or alcohol-based rubs – is a simple yet effective way of stopping the spread of harmful germs. As the leading national agency focusing on this issue, the Commission has declared healthcare-associated infections and the control of antibiotic resistance as a priority area, and funds Hand Hygiene Australia to develop a national approach to improving hand hygiene and monitor its effectiveness through the National Hand Hygiene Initiative (NHHI).

The Commission’s CEO, Adjunct Professor Debora Picone, said while several factors, such as the unnecessary use of antibiotics, were responsible for driving antibiotic resistance, hand hygiene among health workers and the public is an important tool in stopping the spread of infection.

“We must all play our role in stopping the spread of harmful bacteria,” Professor Picone said.

“Doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers who come into contact with patients, as well as the rest of the community can all help. Ask your health care professional – ‘have you washed your hands?’”

The ‘Five Moments for Hand Hygiene’ reminds all healthcare workers of the need to ensure clean hands. These moments are before touching a patient, before a procedure, after a procedure and after touching a patient, and after touching a patient’s surroundings.

The Commission is leading the Australian response to antibiotic and antimicrobial resistance through its work on the Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Australia (AURA) Surveillance System, which is an integrated approach to monitoring antibiotic use across the country and coordinates reports of critical antimicrobial resistances to ensure health authorities can respond appropriately.

So, on Friday – and every day – remember to wash your hands!
About the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care
The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) is an Australian Government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in the safety and quality of health care based on the best available evidence. By working in partnership with patients, consumers, clinicians, managers, policy makers and health care organisations, our aim is to achieve a sustainable, safe and high-quality health system. As a result of its work, the Commission has an ongoing program of significant national activity with outcomes that are demonstrating direct patient benefit as well as creating essential underpinnings for ongoing improvement. The Commission aims to use its role as the national body for safety and quality in health care in Australia to ensure that the health system is better informed, supported and organised to deliver safe and high-quality care.