Hand Hygiene

Executive Summary

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, proper hand hygiene by healthcare workers is the most important practice for preventing healthcare associated infections. However, compliance with hand hygiene is often low—data indicates that compliance rates among healthcare workers are below 50%. Some research indicates that compliance rates among long-term care workers may be lower than among other healthcare workers.

Each year, about 2 million individuals develop a healthcare-associated infection, about 90,000 of whom die. Older adults in long-term care settings are at a high risk of contracting infections, and infections are the leading cause of resident transfers to hospitals.

What ECRI Found

Long-term care facilities should address barriers to hand hygiene compliance and implement strategies to improve compliance, such as education on when and how to perform hand hygiene, resident education programs, and monitoring of hand hygiene compliance. Multimodal strategies are often more effective than single interventions.

Action Recommendations

- Ensure that workers are aware of the facility’s policies on hand hygiene.
- Provide staff with education on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s and the World Health Organization’s hand hygiene recommendations.
- Ensure strong leadership support for hand hygiene compliance.
- Ensure that workers know when to use alcohol rubs, when to perform traditional handwashing, and proper techniques to achieve decontamination.
- Monitor hand hygiene compliance, and provide feedback to facilitate improvement.
- Ensure that healthcare workers are aware of the facility’s policies on hand hygiene.
- Provide staff with education on CDC’s and WHO’s hand hygiene recommendations.
- Select hand hygiene products based on evaluation of efficacy and acceptability by staff members who will use the products.
- Ensure strong leadership support for hand hygiene compliance.
- Ensure that healthcare workers know why hand hygiene is important for both resident and worker safety.

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