

WHO global annual “SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands” campaign

Talking points

Key messages

About hand hygiene

- Annually more than 8 million deaths in low- and middle-income countries are attributed to poor quality care and failures in infection prevention measures during health care.
- However, infections and antimicrobial resistance in health care are not only a concern in developing countries but are actually a worldwide problem.
- Hands play an important role in the COVID-19 virus transmission because contaminated hands are the vehicle transferring the virus to the mouth, nose or eyes and also from one surface to another by contaminated hands.
- Hand hygiene is one of (if not the) most effective action to reduce the spread of pathogens and prevent infections, including the COVID-19 virus.

About the Hand Hygiene Campaign

- Since 2009, every year, we celebrate the WHO “Save Lives: Clean your Hands” campaign on 5 May. Also thanks to the strength and effectiveness of this campaign, this year hand hygiene has been vigorously promoted and implemented as a critical prevention measure in the fight against COVID-19.
- Many countries are committed to improving hand hygiene. So far, 142 out of the 194 WHO Member States have made formal statements pledging their support to the Campaign. So far, more than 20 000 health care facilities across 189 countries are actively engaged in improving hand hygiene.
- All around the world, more than 80 countries have implemented their own national campaigns, using WHO support and resources.
- However, we need to do more. Globally 3 billion people lack access to hand hygiene facilities and two out of five health care facilities lack them at points of care. Alcohol-based hand rubs

availability is still limited around the world, including uncertain quality. The need for rapidly improving access to hand hygiene facilities for the prevention of the COVID-19 virus is particularly acute in low-and middle-income countries.

- Poor hand hygiene practices are also due to overload and lack of time by clinical teams given the shortage of staff affecting the health systems in both high- and low-/middle-income countries.
- This year, WHO's annual 5 May global hand hygiene campaign has a special focus that is the role of nurses and midwives in delivering clean care through hand hygiene and infection prevention and control (IPC) best practices. This theme links to the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife that is celebrated this year. The slogan of the campaign is **“Nurses and Midwives: clean care is in your hands”**.

About nurses and midwives

- Nurses and other health care workers are the front-line heroes saving lives during this current pandemic. In the meantime, neonatal and maternal care remain a critical, essential service and midwives continue to help women give birth, renewing life during these hard times. Alongside the *Year of the Nurse and the Midwife*, the 2020 global hand hygiene campaign recognizes their critical role in IPC and hand hygiene practices.
- Given their special proximity to the patient, nurses and midwives are also best placed to advise patients and families on good hand hygiene and infection prevention practices. However, the global shortage of nurses and midwives is a major challenge to infection prevention, because low nurse-to-patient ratio is associated with spread of pathogens and thus, increased health care-associated infection rates and outbreaks.
- The world needs 9 million more nurses and midwives to achieve health for all by 2030.
- Increased nurse staffing levels and education in skill-mix teams are correlated with reduced adverse events among hospitalized patients, including catheter-associated urinary infections, bloodstream infections, and ventilation-associated pneumonia.
- Nurses are important in ensuring quality of care and play an essential role in ensuring patient safety by monitoring patients for clinical deterioration, detecting errors and near misses, understanding care processes and weaknesses inherent in some systems, and performing numerous other tasks to ensure patients receive high quality care.

- In outbreaks such as COVID-19 where hand hygiene, physical distancing and surface disinfection are central to the containment effort, the infection prevention and control nurses are essential staff for response and control.

About the content of the 2020 Hand Hygiene Campaign

- The content of the 2020 Hand Hygiene Campaign promotes key messages for nurses and midwives and acknowledge their essential contribution to health care and their role in achieving clean care and patient safety, including by performing and promoting hand hygiene.
- This campaign also makes a call to action to policy-makers to provide good and safe work environments to nurses and improve staffing levels and to IPC leaders to empower nurses and midwives in providing clean care.
- Patients and families are also invited to team up with nurses and midwives and contribute to achieving clean and safe care in their own way.
- There is robust scientific evidence that good nurse staffing levels correlate with reduced lengths of stay in hospital, lower incidence of adverse events such as pneumonia, gastritis, upper gastrointestinal bleeds, pressure ulcers, and catheter-associated urinary tract infections, and reduced overall mortality.
- Having dedicated, trained teams in health care facilities for the purpose of preventing health care-associated infection and combating antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through good IPC practices is essential. The leadership of nurses is essential to promoting IPC programmes across the organization, and disseminating and implementing IPC measures.

About universal free public hand hygiene stations

- Community members can play a critical role in fighting COVID-19 by adopting frequent hand hygiene as part of their day-to-day practices.
- Therefore, free access and obligatory use of hand hygiene stations during the COVID-19 pandemic would help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus and save lives.
- By widely improving hand hygiene practices, countries can help prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Member States are being encouraged to promptly implement the DG recommendations by providing universal access to public hand hygiene stations and highly encouraging their use before

entering any public or private commercial building and any public transport facility. Improving access to hand hygiene facilities and practices within health care facilities is also essential.

- The DG recommendations should be put into effect as soon as possible and be implemented as well as is possible, according to local conditions in each country.
- Health care facilities are strongly encouraged to participate in the [WHO Save Lives: Clean Your Hands campaign](#) to be celebrated on 5 May 2020 and to respond to the United Nations Secretary-General's [Global Call to Action on WASH in health care facilities](#).