

## Hand Hygiene in the Veterinary Practice

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) are infections that patients develop while receiving treatment for medical or surgical conditions, many of which are preventable. HAIs can have devastating effects on the health of veterinary patients, the emotional and financial well-being of the pet owner, and practice reputation.

**Good infection prevention strategies protect not only patients, but owners and veterinary professionals as well.**

The most important and frequent mode of transmission of HAIs is contact transmission which includes:

- Direct body surface-to-body surface (any contact with patients)
- Contact with an inanimate object or environmental surface (kennel & cage doors, leashes, exam tables)
- Contact of another animal or person that has been contaminated by the original source (shaking a pet owner's hand, contact with other staff)

**Hand hygiene is the single most important measure for infection control in healthcare facilities<sup>2</sup>**

**There are two methods of sanitizing hands:**

### **ALCOHOL-BASED HAND SANITIZERS**

In most cases alcohol-based hand sanitizers/rubs (ABHR) are the preferred method for decontaminating hands that are not visibly soiled.

#### **Benefits of ABHR's**

- Superior ability to kill microorganisms on the skin
- Quick application
- Less likely to cause skin damage
- Can be made readily available at almost any point of care

### **HAND WASHING**

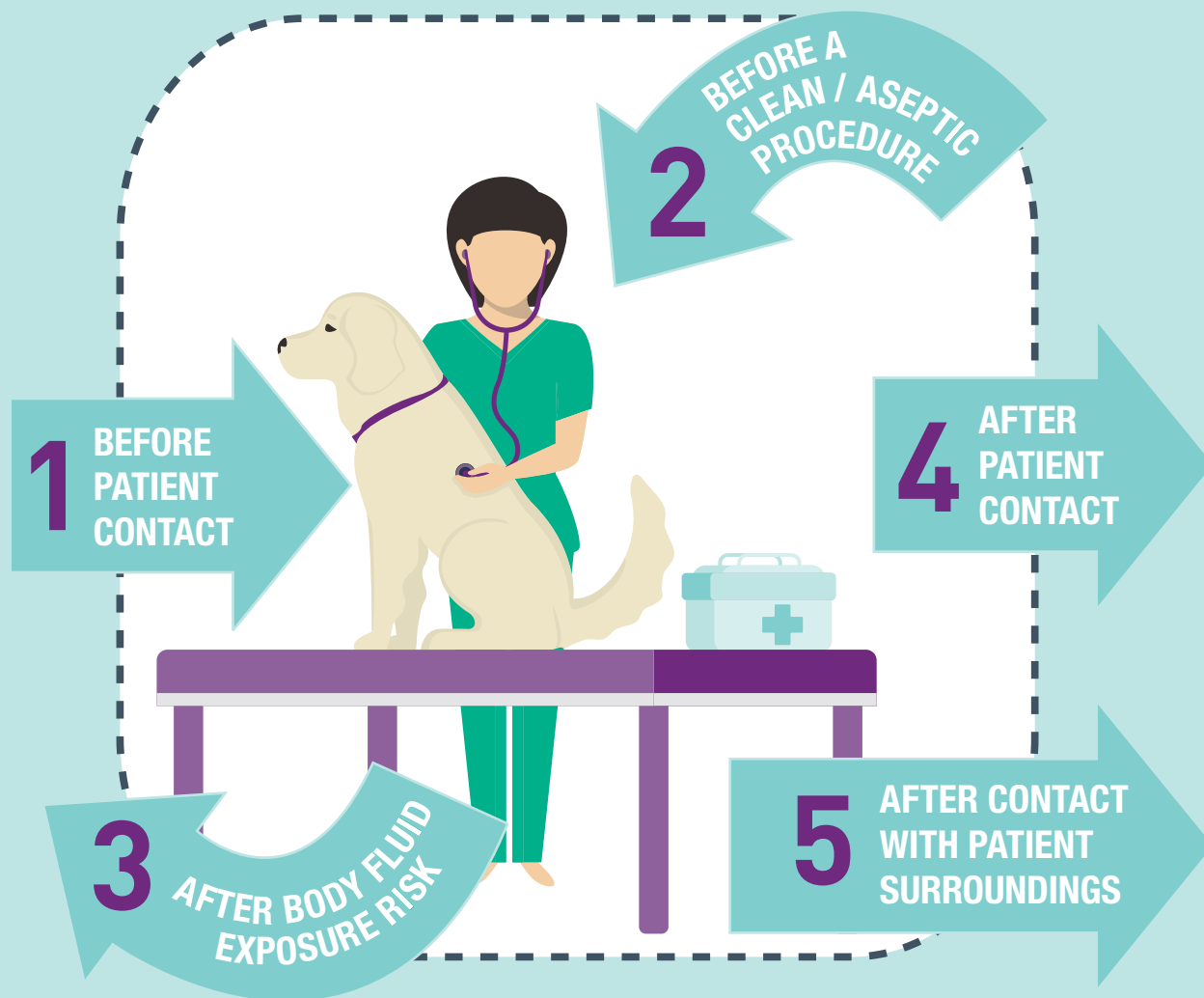
Most transient bacteria present on the hands are removed during the mechanical action of washing, rinsing and drying hands. Hand washing with soap and running water must be performed when hands are visibly soiled.

**Gloves are NOT a substitute for proper hand hygiene.**

**Hand washing and hand sanitizing posters available for download at <http://www.debgroup.com/ca/veterinary>**

<sup>1</sup>. Infection Prevention and Control Best Practices For Small Animal Veterinary Clinics August 2008 Sponsored by The Canadian Committee on Antibiotic Resistance. <sup>2</sup>. Contact Precautions and Hand Hygiene in Veterinary Clinics. Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice, Volume 45, Issue 2, March 2015, Pages 343-360.

# When to practice hand hygiene



<b>1</b>	<b>Before touching patient</b>	<b>When?</b> <b>Why?</b> <b>Examples</b>	Clean hands before touching the patient. To protect the patient against harmful germs you carried on your hands. Clinical examinations, handling patient, restraining patient...
<b>2</b>	<b>Before a clean / aseptic procedure</b>	<b>When?</b> <b>Why?</b> <b>Examples</b>	Clean hands immediately before and after an aseptic task. To protect the patient against harmful germs, including patients own, from entering its body. Blood sampling, IV catheter manipulation, intra-articular joint treatment, medication administration, catheter placement, wound care...
<b>3</b>	<b>After body fluid exposure</b>	<b>When?</b> <b>Why?</b> <b>Examples</b>	Clean hands immediately after exposure risk to body fluids and after glove removal. To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs. After contact with any body fluid like urine, blood, nasal discharge, saliva, faeces...
<b>4</b>	<b>After touching a patient</b>	<b>When?</b> <b>Why?</b> <b>Examples</b>	Clean hands immediately after exposure risk to body fluids and after glove removal. To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs. After clinical exams, after bandage changes, grooming...
<b>5</b>	<b>After touching the patients surroundings</b>	<b>When?</b> <b>Why?</b> <b>Examples</b>	Clean hands after touching any object or furniture in the patient surroundings when leaving even if the patient has not been touched. To protect yourself and the healthcare environment from harmful patient germs. When leaving the exam room, kennel area or the hospital.

<sup>3</sup>. June 2016 Worms & Germs Blog, Dr. Scott Weese, [www.wormsandgermsblog.com](http://www.wormsandgermsblog.com)