If you are admitted to hospital for any reason:

The risk of contacting bad germs with your hands is higher when you are a patient in a hospital, because that's where all the really sick people are.

Make sure you clean your hands:

- Before you eat
- Before you leave your room
- After using the toilet, commode, or bedpan (ask for alcohol-based hand rub or a wet cloth to clean your hands).
- After returning to your room

Always clean your hands before eating!

Don't be afraid to remind your healthcare providers (doctors, nurses, social workers, physiotherapists, etc.) to clean their hands. You have the right to be cared for by people with clean hands, and you don't want the germs that every other patient they saw before you had!

When you are at home

Usually family members have the same – or similar – germs that hang around their bodies (e.g. on their skin, in their mouth and nose). Unless a family member has become sick or has a chronic health condition (e.g. cancer), these regular germs don't pose any danger. Keeping your house clean and tidy and good personal hygiene (shower daily, clean mouth and teeth twice a day) is all that is needed. When you are at home, make sure you clean your hands **before** preparing food or eating, and **after** using the toilet, blowing your nose, covering your cough or sneeze, touching your pets, or handling raw food.

When you are out in public

Remember, everyone brings with them a gang of good and bad germs, and they leave a few here and there whenever they touch something. The best way to avoid picking those freeloaders up is to avoid touching your face, rubbing your nose or eyes, and cleaning your hands often when out in public. It's a good idea to keep some alcohol-based hand rub in your car (or purse!) or wash your hands well with soap and water as soon as you return home.

More information

You can find more information on hospital infection control at www.picnet.ca.

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Clean hands:
the best way to avoid getting an infection

Information for patients, visitors, and the public

Provincial Health Services Authority
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Clean hands are the best way to avoid getting an infection

Did you know that there are germs on everything we touch? Not all germs are bad; some are needed for body functions. The problem is that we can't see them, and the ones that make us sick are mixed in with the good germs.

After we touch something and pick up those germs (good and bad), we often rub our eyes, rub our nose, or put our fingers in our mouths without even thinking about it (we all do this). This gives the germs that make us sick a free ride right into our bodies! You can imagine what happens next: we get sick (cough, fever, vomiting, diarrhea etc.). So how do we avoid this? Clean our hands!

Your new best friends

1. Soap and water
If you're near a handwashing sink, then:
- Wet your hands and apply soap
- Rub hands vigorously for at least 15 seconds (it takes lots of friction to remove all the germs)
- Rinse thoroughly
- Dry your hands completely.

2. Hand sanitizer

Use a **loonie-sized amount** and rub it into the fingers and whole hand like hand lotion. Keep rubbing it in until your hands are dry. This should take at least 15 seconds. (If it takes less time, you're not using enough; you want to kill **all** those germs!)

Which is better?

Soap and sanitizer work in different ways. Sanitizer **kills** germs on contact (the alcohol dries them out), whereas soap **removes** germs from your hands - and you wash them down the drain. In a hospital, sanitizer is usually the easiest to find; there are dispensers on the walls, and each patient should have a bottle or dispenser at their bedside.

The only thing sanitizer does not do is **remove dirt**, so if you hands are visibly soiled, you should use soap and water.

If you find that washing your hands lots gives you dry skin, you can use hand lotion to keep the skin of your hands healthy.

Mythbusting

Sanitizer does not build resistance in germs. Some people (even the media!) have confused this with antibiotic resistance, which happens when certain germs build resistance to antibiotic medications. This has nothing to do with hand cleaning!

Hand sanitizer is safe, effective, and does not make germs stronger.

Germs get around, so be sure to clean all parts of your hands!

in between the fingers

fingertips and nails

thumbs

palms

backs of the hands

wrists