

Term	Definition
Hand hygiene	A general term referring to any action of hand cleansing (handwashing, antiseptic handwash, antiseptic hand rub, or surgical hand antisepsis).
Hand cleansing	Action of performing hand hygiene for the purpose of physically or mechanically removing dirt, organic material or microorganisms.
Handwashing	Washing hands with plain or antimicrobial soap and water.
Hand antisepsis	Reducing or inhibiting the growth of microorganisms by the application of an antiseptic hand rub or by performing an antiseptic handwash.
Hand rubbing	Action of applying an alcohol-based (waterless) hand hygiene product.
Inherent hand hygiene practice	Instinctive need to remove dirt from the skin when hands are visibly soiled, sticky or gritty. Likely to be established in the first ten years of life and to drive the majority of community and HCW hand hygiene behaviour throughout life. For example, among nurses, it occurs after touching an 'emotionally dirty' area (e.g. axillae, groin or genitals).
Elective hand hygiene practice	Attitude to hand cleansing in more specific opportunities not encompassed in the inherent category and more frequently corresponding to some of the indications for hand hygiene during healthcare delivery. For example, among HCWs, it includes touching a patient such as taking a pulse or blood pressure, or having contact with an inanimate object in the patient environment.
Hand drying	Hand drying is an essential step in hand cleansing and should be done in such a way that hand recontamination does not occur. Common hand drying methods include paper towels, cloth towels and hot-air dryers. Warm air drying is not as effective at removing bacteria from washed hands as paper towels; they are also less practical because of longer time needed to achieve dry hands. Paper and cloth towels should be single use.

Hand hygiene products

Alcohol-based hand rub. An alcohol-containing preparation (lotion/rinse, gel or foam) designed for application to the hands to reduce the growth of microorganisms. Such preparations may contain one or more types of alcohol with excipients (inactive substance used as a carrier for the active ingredients of a medication), other active ingredients, and humectants (emollients/moisturisers e.g. Propylene Glycol).

Antimicrobial soap. Soap (detergent) containing an antiseptic agent at a concentration which is sufficient to reduce or inhibit the growth of microorganisms.

Antiseptic agent. An antimicrobial substance which reduces or inhibits the growth of microorganisms on living tissues. Examples include alcohols, chlorhexidine gluconate, chlorine derivatives, iodine, and triclosan.

Detergent (surfactant). Compounds that possess a cleaning action. They are composed of a hydrophilic and a lipophilic part and can be divided into four groups: anionic, cationic, amphoteric, and non-ionic. Although products used for handwashing or antiseptic handwash in health care represent various types of detergents, the term "soap" will be used to refer to such detergents in this document.

Plain soap. Detergents that do not contain antimicrobial agents, or that contain very low concentrations of antimicrobial agents effective solely as preservatives.

Waterless antiseptic agent. An antiseptic agent that does not require the use of exogenous water. After application, the individual rubs the hands together until the agent has dried. The term includes different types of hand rubs (liquid formulations, gels, foams, leaflets/towelets).