

# Bare Below the Elbows

## Queensland Health Guideline

### Guideline for Bare Below the Elbows

#### 1. Purpose

This guideline provides recommendations to support Queensland Health in the application of programs for bare below the elbows for the enhancement of effective hand hygiene by healthcare workers.

#### 2. Scope

This Guideline provides information for all Queensland public health system employees (permanent, temporary and casual) and all organisations and individuals acting as its agents (including Visiting Medical Officers and other partners, contractors, consultants, students and volunteers).

#### 3. Related documents

##### Standards, procedures, guidelines

- [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare](#)
- [Hand Hygiene Australia Manual](#)
- [WHO guidelines on hand hygiene in health care](#)
- [Queensland Health Guideline for management of patients with Clostridium difficile infection \(CDI\)](#)

#### 4. Guideline for bare below the elbows

Healthcare workers should perform hand hygiene in accordance with the [National Hand Hygiene Initiative](#) and [Hand Hygiene Australia Manual](#).

Intact skin is a first line defence mechanism against infection<sup>1</sup>. The World Health Organization recommends that long sleeves be avoided by healthcare workers<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the effectiveness of hand hygiene may be improved when: skin is intact, fingernails are natural, short and unvarnished; hands and forearms are free of jewellery; and sleeves are above the elbow. A bare below the elbows approach complements effective hand hygiene.

Staff having direct contact with patients or a patient's environment should observe the following:

- bracelets, wrist watches and rings with stones or ridges should not be worn. A single flat ring or band may be worn but should not interfere with effective hand hygiene practice
- long sleeves should be avoided. If worn, sleeves should be rolled or pushed up above the elbow so as not to interfere with effective hand hygiene practice
- fingernails should be kept short and clean and nail polish should not be worn. Artificial nails (gel or acrylic) should not be worn
- any breached skin (cuts, dermatitis or abrasion) should be covered with a waterproof film dressing. Staff with dermatitis should report for evaluation as per local procedures
- long ties and lanyards are not recommended. Retractable (or similar) ID card holders are recommended in place of lanyards and should be cleaned regularly. If ties are worn they should be tucked in or secured

## 5. Document approval details

### Document custodian

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### Approval officer

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**Approval date:** 19 October 2017

## 6. Version control

Version	Date	Prepared by	Comments / reason for update
1.0	04/10/2017	Communicable Diseases & Infection Management Unit, Communicable Diseases Branch	New guideline published following rescinding of Department of Health Guideline for Hand Hygiene and following consultation.

## 7. References

1. Hand Hygiene Australia. 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare, 2017.
2. World Health Organisation. WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care. In: World Alliance for Patient Safety, First Global Patient Safety Challenge Clean Care is Safer Care. 1 ed. Geneva: World Health Organisation Press; 2009.