



VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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Why Don't Healthcare Workers Wash Their Hands?

Lay people know that hand washing is critical for preventing the transmission of disease. Children in kindergarten are taught to sneeze into their antecubital fossae (I heard a kid call that particular anatomic site his "elbow pit") instead of their hands. You'd think that people making a living dealing with people who have diseases would be rabid about hand washing. There are several self-reported factors which healthcare workers give for their poor compliance with hand hygiene.

I Don't Wash My Hands Because:

- Hand-washing agents cause irritation and dry skin
- There are no sinks in the units
- There are no soap or paper towels available
- Too busy/ Not enough time
- Not enough staff
- Too crowded
- Patient care takes priority
- Washing hands interferes with relationship with patients
- There is a low risk of acquiring infection from patients
- If I wear gloves, I don't need to wash
- I don't know the protocols
- I forget
- I don't see my superiors serving as a role model
- It doesn't make any difference
- I don't agree with the recommendations
- There is no scientific information to support hand washing
- The company doesn't try to make us safe in other ways
- They don't reward me if I do or punish me if I don't



This list was actually adapted from CDC standards and articles in the infection control literature. Have you heard any of these excuses? Is there peer pressure for good handwashing? If your partner contaminates him/herself, aren't you next?

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