

Alberta Hand Hygiene Strategy



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Alberta

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INTRODUCTION

The Alberta Hand Hygiene Strategy is a ten-year plan designed to improve hand hygiene behaviours in Alberta. It supports disease prevention and Albertans' healthy living. It is a critical component of and underpins the success of the Alberta Infection Prevention and Control Strategy*.

Hand hygiene is one of the simplest ways for Albertans to stay healthy. Next to immunization, keeping hands clean is one of the most important ways to stop the spread of disease. Germs are a part of everyday life. Some bacteria are beneficial and part of our body's natural protection against disease. Other bacteria and viruses cause disease and are commonly introduced to the body when touching hands to the mouth, nose or eyes. Eighty percent of common infections are spread by our hands.

Despite all that is known about the effectiveness of hand hygiene, many people do not clean their hands as often as they should. The approach taken to date to improve individual hand hygiene has focused on education with limited impact. There are many system-wide factors that affect individual hand hygiene practices:

- Accessibility and maintenance of hand hygiene facilities and access to hand hygiene products
- Knowledge and understanding about hand hygiene and the spread of disease
- Cultural and individual beliefs and motivation about the value of hand hygiene and its role in infection prevention and control and patient safety
- Product advertising
- Effects of hand hygiene products (e.g. skin irritations)
- Partnerships to strengthen hand hygiene practices.

Hand hygiene is important for individual health and the health of the community. It is relevant in all settings: the home and work environment; communal living settings; public areas; and health care settings. To improve hand hygiene in all of these settings, Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW) and its partners considered the above factors in developing this Strategy. The intent of the Strategy is to address system-level barriers to hand hygiene and develop a culture where it is unacceptable to not practice hand hygiene. AHW will work together with its partners in a comprehensive, structured manner over the next ten years to improve hand hygiene behaviours in all settings and in the public at large. Implementation of the Strategy will be a shared responsibility between the key partners.

* The Alberta Infection Prevention and Control Strategy is an overarching long-term strategy to improve infection prevention and control across Alberta's health system and in Alberta communities.

THE ALBERTA HAND HYGIENE STRATEGY

VISION

The vision of Alberta's Hand Hygiene Strategy is:

“Alberta ... clean hands for health.”

GOAL

The goal of the Strategy is to:

- Improve hand hygiene to minimize the risk to health.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Access to hand hygiene facilities and products
2. Provider education and training
3. Child education and training
4. Public and community education and awareness
5. Evaluation and research

The following sections outline objectives and actions for each of these strategic directions. Alberta Health and Wellness will take a leadership role in implementing this Strategy, in partnership with Alberta government ministries and with various federal, regional and other partners.

KEY PARTNERS

- **Provincial ministries:** Health and Wellness; Advanced Education and Technology; Children's Services; Education; Employment Immigration and Industry; Infrastructure and Transportation; Justice and Attorney General; and Seniors and Community Supports.
- **Regional and federal partners:** Health authorities; Health Quality Council of Alberta; school authorities and learning institutions; child and family services authorities; First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada-Alberta Region; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (for facilities on reserve); Public Health Agency of Canada; Canada Alberta Partners in Food Safety; and the Canadian Patient Safety Institute.
- **Other partners:** “Do Bugs Need Drugs?” Program; continuing education programs; non-governmental organizations; employers and employee unions; sports and recreation leagues and organizations; professional organizations; cultural groups; and industry.

1. Access to Hand Hygiene Facilities and Products

Issue:

Physical infrastructure is a necessary pre-requisite to improve hand hygiene practice. This includes facilities such as sinks and dispensers; products such as soap, paper towels and hand rubs; and readily available water sources. There is no existing provincial approach to address hand hygiene infrastructure in health care or other communal settings such as schools.

Objectives:

- Improve access to hand hygiene facilities and products in all settings.

Proposed Actions:

- Conduct provincial, regional and local surveys assessing the availability of hand hygiene facilities/products and their use, and report the results. The initial focus will be on health care settings, schools and other communal settings.
- Develop and implement plans to improve access to appropriate hand hygiene facilities and products (including no-touch systems), as well as education on the need for proper hand hygiene facilities and use of appropriate products.
- Enhance custodial training in the maintenance of washroom facilities and supply of hand hygiene products.
- Develop infrastructure guidelines and standards to include/improve hand hygiene facilities in existing and proposed facilities.

Key Partners

Provincial ministries: Health and Wellness; Education; Advanced Education and Technology; Children's Services; Employment, Immigration and Industry; and Infrastructure and Transportation

Regional, local and federal partners: Health authorities; school authorities and learning institutions; child and family services authorities; First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada-Alberta Region; and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (facilities on reserve)

Provider professional groups

2. Provider Education and Training

Issue:

Providers are those who work in contact with patients, clients or customers, such as health professionals and food service employees who can influence better hand hygiene behaviour in others.

There is little consistency in provider support of and commitment to hand hygiene. Research indicates that health care workers grossly overestimate their rates of hand hygiene compliance. On average, overestimates range between 40 to 70%^{1, 2, 3, 4}. Actual hand hygiene compliance is often observed in less than 50% of instances^{1, 2, 3}. The low rate of compliance is an important issue due to the high correlation between hand hygiene compliance rates and hospital acquired infection rates.

Objectives:

- Improve provider knowledge, beliefs and attitudes on the importance of hand hygiene.
- Improve provider hand hygiene practices (i.e., improve compliance rates).

Proposed Actions:

- Develop policies to improve and maintain provider hand hygiene behaviour and collaborate in the creation and implementation of hand hygiene prompting systems to address compliance.
- Improve overall hand hygiene education in all relevant post-secondary and occupational training programs, focusing on hand hygiene compliance, hand hygiene techniques, reasons for hand hygiene, and tools to teach hand hygiene.
- Enhance provider education, training and resource materials through the availability of and access to up-to-date information and expert advice on hand hygiene techniques, hand hygiene products, and hand hygiene importance.
- Change environments to support provider hand hygiene; encourage hand hygiene prompting by clients/patients receiving service from provider; monitor provider hand hygiene behaviours and provide feedback on hand hygiene practices.
- Establish and maintain a Provincial Hand Hygiene Network to optimize the use of financial and human resources in the planning, delivery and evaluation of hand hygiene programs.
- Promote and support multi-disciplinary partnerships between public health, service providers, educators, educational organizations, and community organizations to deliver intervention programs.

Key Partners

Provincial ministries: Health and Wellness; Education; Advanced Education and Technology; Children's Services; Employment, Immigration and Industry; and Justice and Attorney General

Regional, local and federal partners: Health authorities; school authorities and learning institutions; child and family services authorities; "Do Bugs Need Drugs?" program; professional organizations; continuing education programs; non-governmental organizations; large employers and employee unions; sports and recreational leagues and organizations; industry; First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada-Alberta Region; Public Health Agency of Canada; Canada Alberta Partners in Food Safety; and Canadian Patient Safety Institute

3. Child Education and Training

Issue:

Children’s behaviours are shaped in the home environment and may influence lifelong habits. Hand hygiene is often not sufficiently stressed in the home, child care centres and school settings, which may contribute to development of poor hand hygiene habits. Because behaviours are established in childhood, teaching children the importance of hand hygiene at an early age will improve their hand hygiene behaviours and may encourage better hand hygiene in adults in their households.

Objectives:

- Improve children’s knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about the importance of hand hygiene and the proper technique.
- Improve children’s hand hygiene practices.

Proposed Actions:

- Develop provincial policies to promote hand hygiene compliance in school and child care facilities.
- Plan, coordinate, deliver, and evaluate hand hygiene programs, including their provision in school curricula.
- Expand existing hand hygiene education programs to children and parents such as the “Do Bugs Need Drugs?” program, school educational programs and parental hand hygiene education of new mothers.
- Develop and implement collaborative and coordinated approaches in addressing low hand hygiene compliance among children.
- Encourage industry to develop and market hand hygiene products suitable for children.

Key Partners

Provincial ministries: Health and Wellness; Education; Advanced Education and Technology; Children’s Services; and Employment, Immigration and Industry

Federal, regional and local partners: Health authorities; school authorities and learning institutions; child and family services authorities; “Do Bugs Need Drugs?” program; industry; First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada-Alberta Region; Public Health Agency of Canada; Canada Alberta Partners in Food Safety

4. Public and Community Education and Awareness

Issue:

Knowledge of the importance of clean hands, proper techniques for hand hygiene and the use of soap and hand rubs are generally lacking in the public at large. This is evidenced through self-reported behaviour surveys and anecdotal observations of poor hand hygiene practices in public washrooms, during meal preparation and with personal food handling. Poor practices include poor respiratory etiquette and other situations where peoples' hands are being exposed to substantial bacteria not being cleansed before providing service, handling food or eating. There is general reluctance among the public to prompt service providers to clean their hands if they have not seen them do so.

Objectives:

- Improve public knowledge on the importance of hand hygiene.
- Improve public hand hygiene practices.
- Increase acceptability of expecting providers to practice hand hygiene.
- Decrease acceptability of not doing hand hygiene.
- Improve effectiveness, collaboration and partnerships among organizations able to influence hand hygiene.

Proposed Actions:

- Monitor public knowledge, attitudes and behaviour using population health surveys.
- Develop policies to support improved public hand hygiene behaviour.
- Develop targeted public education and multi-component hand hygiene campaigns using social marketing principles.
- Develop and sustain collaborative working relationships with other provincial government departments, the federal government, primary care organizations/networks, community-based organizations, health authorities, and organizations, non-governmental organizations and other sectors involved in hand hygiene education to address low hand hygiene compliance among the public.
- Provide opportunities for public and private sector discussions, regarding initiatives that promote effective hand hygiene behaviour.

Key Partners

Provincial ministries: Health and Wellness; Advanced Education and Technology, Employment, Immigration and Industry, and Seniors and Community Supports

Regional, local and federal partners: Health authorities; Health Quality Council of Alberta, learning institutions; non-governmental organizations; cultural groups; industry; media; First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada-Alberta Region; Public Health Agency of Canada

5. Evaluation and Research

Issue:

Evaluation of hand hygiene interventions has been limited. There is evidence that monitoring hand hygiene behaviour in health care settings is key to measuring progress and refining strategies. Research on hand hygiene, especially in community settings, is limited in addressing some of the barriers that arise and the characteristics of individuals who fail to practice hand hygiene. Consumers are asking more complex questions regarding the specifics of hand hygiene, such as when or why to use hand rubs, and challenging the extent to which hand hygiene needs to be practiced or is effective.

Objectives:

- Evaluate hand hygiene programs, including existing and newly implemented Alberta hand hygiene initiatives.
- Facilitate research on hand hygiene to support evidence-based practice as part of existing programs or new initiatives.

Proposed Actions:

- Encourage and support networks of individuals, universities and other organizations, involved in research, program development, and evaluation to:
 - Address the challenges, effectiveness and compliance with hand hygiene.
 - Research antibiotic resistant strains of hand-transmitted bacteria as well as the effectiveness of hand hygiene products.
 - Study hand hygiene compliance within various regional and local settings, with focus on under-served populations.
 - Evaluate hand hygiene initiatives, including product testing and evaluation.
- Disseminate results to partners at the national, provincial and regional levels to provide information on best practices.
- Use research and evaluation results to support standards development, policy planning and service performance.
- Provide recognition for industry leaders and hand hygiene successes as demonstrated through evaluation and research initiatives.

Key Partners

Provincial ministries: Health and Wellness; Advanced Education and Technology, Employment, Immigration and Industry; and Seniors and Community Supports

Regional, local and federal partners: Health authorities; Health Quality Council of Alberta; academic institutions; Alberta Medical Heritage Foundation for Medical Research; Institute for Health Economics; non-governmental organizations; industry; First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada-Alberta Region; Public Health Agency of Canada

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation will include introducing, developing and evaluating these strategic directions over the next ten years. Detailed action plans will stem from these strategic directions and be implemented in conjunction with the Alberta Infection Prevention and Control Strategy.

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