



5 May 2020 – World Hand Hygiene Day will be celebrated on 5 May 2020. This year’s campaign theme, “SAVE LIVES: Clean your hands”, aligns with the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife. The campaign aims to recognize nurses and midwives as front-line heroes who deserve acknowledgement, appreciation and protection, and to highlight their critical role in infection prevention and control.

Handwashing is one of the most effective actions everyone can take to reduce the spread of pathogens and prevent infections, including infection with the COVID-19 virus. Health workers and community members alike can help to prevent infections by practising regular and frequent handwashing.

Welcoming World Hand Hygiene Day, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, reiterated the crucial importance of hand hygiene as a vital infection prevention and control (IPC) measure that has been proven to improve the quality of patient care and decrease infections acquired during health care.

“Good hand hygiene practices are crucial to improve patient safety and is becoming the front line of defence for the health care team, including nurses and midwives. Now more than ever, the SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands campaign is vital – in our Region and all around the world – to promote hand hygiene and combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic,” Dr Al-Mandhari said.

Celebrated every year on 5 May, World Hand Hygiene Day mobilizes people across the globe to increase adherence to hand hygiene in health care facilities, thus protecting health care workers and patients from infections.

Ensuring adequate hand hygiene in health care facilities is an ongoing challenge – 2 in every 5 health care settings lack hand hygiene facilities at point of care. Hand hygiene is essential to support the safety and dignity of nurses, midwives and other health workforce. It can be achieved simply and at low cost, provided basic facilities are put in place.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of clean and safe hand hygiene practices as a first line of IPC. Not only is good hand hygiene essential to defeat COVID-19, but it also helps to limit the risk from other health care-associated infections, which constitute a severe burden on health systems and exert a terrible toll of sickness and deaths that could have been avoided.

As part of the 2020 campaign, WHO and partners aim to make hand hygiene a global priority and engage health care workers as key agents in preventing infection. The campaign also ties in with the United Nations Secretary-General's Global Call to Action to prioritize action on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in health care facilities.

On World Hand Hygiene Day 2020, WHO calls on everyone – health care professionals, patients and their visitors, and the general public as well as policy-makers, health care providers and IPC leaders – to come together to raise awareness of hand hygiene in their communities.

Dr Al-Mandhari summed up the core messages of the campaign: “I address nurses and midwives, in particular, and the communities that surround them and ask them to ensure that they practise safe hand hygiene practices to protect themselves and their patients. They are responsible for making their environment better and safer by asking for the essentials such as running water, soap and alcohol based sanitizers in the health facilities they work in. I am also asking them to be the role models to teach their families and communities the great value of the simple act of proper hand hygiene.

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