

5 May 2021 – Today, the World Health Organization and people around the world celebrate World Hand Hygiene Day. The 'Save Lives - Clean your Hands' global campaign observed annually on 5 May aims to maintain global visibility of the importance of hand hygiene in health care facilities and in communities. The campaign aims to promote sustained hand hygiene improvements around the world as evidence from all levels of health care systems shows that enhancing hand hygiene practices improves quality of care and patient safety. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted further how appropriate hand hygiene practices prevent transmission as part of a comprehensive package of public health and infection control measures in health facilities and communities.

"Hand hygiene is the most basic measure to prevent and control infection. It enhances the quality and safety of health care. However, despite global, regional and country efforts, hand hygiene is still poorly practised in many health care facilities," said Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Data show that 1 in every 10 patients gets an infection while receiving care and one in 3 facilities do not have adequate stations to clean hands where care is provided. In high-income countries, out of every 100 patients in acute care hospitals, 7 acquire at least one health

care-associated infection. In low- and middle-income countries, including in countries of the Region, this number is 15 which is more than twice as high. Appropriate hand hygiene prevents up to 50% of avoidable infections acquired during health care delivery.

This year, the theme for Hand Hygiene Day is 'Achieving hand hygiene at the point of care' with the slogan 'Seconds save lives – clean your hands'. Hand hygiene facilities and products at the point of care should be available and easily accessible to improve compliance to hand hygiene. This is particularly important for low- and middle-income countries, in which compliance with hand hygiene best practices averages 9% compared with about 70% in high-income countries. The slogan underlines the value of spending a few seconds longer on hand hygiene to protect the lives of patients and health care workers.

WHO encourages collaboration to support best hand hygiene practices. Investment in hand hygiene yields huge returns in preventing infection and protecting lives. Implementation of hand hygiene policies can generate economic savings averaging 16 times the cost of their implementation. WHO calls on health care workers to practise hand hygiene now more than ever. In line with the WHO regional vision of health for all by all, we call on vaccinators to clean their hands before giving vaccines. We call on infection prevention and control practitioners to be role models so that they mentor health care workers in effective hand hygiene practices. We call on facility managers to ensure that hand hygiene supplies are available. We call on patients and their families to clean their hands. And finally, we call on the public to make hand cleaning a regular habit to protect against infection.

"Seconds save lives – clean your hands".

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