



Message from

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on the occasion of

World Hand Hygiene Day

Save Lives: Clean Hands

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Health care-associated infections affect hundreds of millions of patients worldwide every year. They can lead to serious illness, prolonged hospital stays, long-term disabilities, additional costs for patients and their families, additional financial burden on the health care system, and sometimes, tragically, loss of life.

Hand hygiene is a primary and very simple action proven to be effective in preventing health care-associated infections and enhancing patient safety. Studies show clear evidence of the cost savings from hand hygiene promotion programmes. From the data available, there is enough evidence to suggest that a considerable proportion of health care providers in the Region do not engage in regular hand hygiene practices. In 2005, WHO launched the First Global Patient Safety Challenge aimed at reducing health care-associated infections through hand hygiene improvements in health care settings.

As part of this major global effort, the WHO global campaign “SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands” was launched. The campaign introduced World Hand Hygiene Day, observed on 5 May every year, to focus on the importance of improving hand hygiene and celebrate achievements in health care facilities around the world. So far, 1317 health care facilities, located in 22 countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, have expressed their commitment to improving hand hygiene by registering in this global campaign.

This year, on the 5th of May, the call to action is: “No action today; no cure tomorrow – make the 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene part of protecting your patients from resistant germs”. A shift has occurred in our world that cannot be reversed – multidrug resistant pathogens are here to stay – we have to minimize these through infection prevention action. Hand hygiene is a primary and very simple action proven to be effective in preventing health care-associated infections and enhancing patient safety. It is the most effective, yet simple and cost-effective means for reducing the transmission of infections.

The web site dedicated for the 5th May campaign provides useful documents and tools that support health care facilities for the assessment of hand hygiene practices as well as the implementation of concrete and evidence-based actions. I urge all health care facilities to join this movement and register on the “SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands” web site.

Repeated monitoring and feedback of a range of hand hygiene indicators reflecting infrastructure, knowledge and practices are vital components of any successful hand hygiene campaign. Health care facilities can obtain a situation analysis of their level of progress in hand hygiene implementation by using the WHO Hand Hygiene Self-Assessment Framework.

WHO strongly recommends all health care facilities to follow the 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene: 1) before patient contact; 2) before cleaning and aseptic procedures; 3) after body fluid exposure risk; 4) after patient contact; and 5) after contact with patient surroundings.

I encourage governments to work closely with health care facilities and hospitals to improve and sustain best hand hygiene practices among care providers at the right times and in the right way.

Together we can work towards ensuring the sustainability of all actions for the long-term benefit of all in health care settings – both patients and care providers.