

Message from

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on the occasion of
WORLD HAND HYGIENE DAY
“SAVE LIVES: CLEAN HANDS”

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On 5 May each year – World Hand Hygiene Day – the Save Lives: Clean Your Hands campaign highlights the importance of hand hygiene in health care and brings people together to support hand hygiene improvement locally and globally.

This is a vital issue. Unfortunately, millions of patients worldwide suffer from health care-related infections. These infections can worsen patients’ illnesses, prolong hospital stays, induce long-term disabilities and even cause death. They also drain resources and impose financial hardship on health care systems as well as on patients’ families. For all these reasons, we need to promote infection prevention and control (IPC) measures, including hand hygiene, to achieve universal health coverage (UHC).

The focus of this year’s global hand hygiene campaign is the importance of hand hygiene practices in achieving UHC, under the theme “Clean care for all – it’s in your hands”. IPC, including hand hygiene, is a practical and evidence-based approach which has been proven to enhance the quality of care and patient safety across all levels of the health system, meaning that more people benefit from effective health care.

Promoting hand hygiene requires coordinated efforts by many different health system stakeholders to eliminate the risk of acquiring health care-associated infections. Health workers, IPC leaders, health facility managers, ministers and policy-makers all have key roles to play, as do patients and the community:

- For health workers, we are promoting the concept “Champion clean care – it is in your hands”.
- IPC leaders need to monitor infection prevention and control standards, take action and improve practices.
- Health facility leaders and managers should determine if their facilities are up to WHO infection control and hand hygiene standards and take part in WHO’s 2019 IPC survey.

- Each ministry of health should assess whether its country meets IPC standards, and monitor and act to achieve quality UHC.
- Patient advocacy groups should encourage patients to assert their right to receive clean, quality care.

Despite the critically important role of hand hygiene in reducing health care-associated infections and achieving UHC, overall compliance with hand hygiene is far from optimal in health care settings. An estimated 70% of health care workers do not routinely practice hand hygiene. The Save Lives: Clean Your Hands website¹ provides useful documents and tools to help health care facilities assess hand hygiene practices and implement concrete, evidence-based measures.

This year in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2622 health care facilities in 22 countries have registered for the campaign. This growing number reflects the immense ongoing efforts in the Region to promote safer care. However, we need to see even more engagement in future years to further advance quality and patient safety practices across the Region.

I urge all health care facilities in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, in both the public and private sectors, to join this movement and commit to Save Lives: Clean Your Hands.

¹ <http://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/register/en/index.html>