

Hand hygiene protocol for the workplace



Hands can carry dangerous germs and materials. Handwashing is a simple, fast and cost-effective method to promote workplace health and prevent the spread of disease. Provision of handwashing facilities with soap and water and promoting handwashing behaviour change can increase the health and welfare of workers, and prevent missed days at work due to illness, thereby increasing morale and productivity. (ILO WASH@work – a self-training Handbook, 2016)

In the context of COVID-19, it has become clear that handwashing is a first line of defence for mitigating the potential impacts of COVID-19 in the workplace. Workplaces are often where large numbers of people congregate in close quarters therefore handwashing with soap plays a critical role in combination with other key behaviours (mask wearing, physical distancing) to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This protocol does not provide new information but consolidates simple recommendations for best practice around handwashing and hygiene in the workplace. It is recommended that this protocol is included in existing standards, certifications and frameworks forming part of mandatory workplace compliance.

Access to improved water, sanitation and handwashing facilities offers opportunity to use those facilities but these must go together with a robust behaviour change

programme to ensure sustained use and for lasting change such as improved health. Hygiene behaviour is crucial but one of the most difficult things to change without robust programming. The following elements (based upon ILO guidance) outline the minimum hand hygiene elements that should be in place for the workplace and should be integrated into existing standards and certification.

Call to Action

On the occasion of Global Handwashing Day and in support of the Hand Hygiene for All initiative, WASH4Work:

1. Recommend that these elements should be considered by all standards and certification schemes used by businesses by sharing this document as a quick reference sheet to accompany their existing standards.
2. Calls upon businesses to utilize this guidance when implementing handwashing programs in the workplace and look to sign the [WASH Pledge](#)
3. Calls upon its partners and those in the WASH community to share these guidelines widely in their networks.



Key Elements

Access

1. Providing adequate access to handwashing facilities, with soap and water, at key locations or touchpoints¹ are important throughout the workplace. One or several hand hygiene stations² should be at the entrance of workplace site, to allow everyone to practice hand hygiene before entering and leaving it.
2. The required number of handwashing facilities will depend on the setup of the workplace, e.g. number of people entering the facilities per hour during peak times; number of people going on lunch break at the same time, ratio of female-male workers etc.³ The facilities should also be based upon the type (children, elderly, those with limited mobility) of users. These facilities need to be available in all key locations of the workplace with continuous provision of soap and water.

Facilities

Handwashing facilities should include:

3. Washing basins accessible for people with disabilities and can be in various shapes or sizes to facilitate multiple users. The basins should be attached to potable running water and should have a drainage system for waste water. According to local authority regulations, considerations should also be made for handwashing stations to allow physical distancing of at least 1-2 meters.
4. Potable running water that is safe to drink is preferable, however, water that is safe for drinking is not necessary for handwashing. The water temperature does not influence effectiveness, but it might contribute to comfort and therefore encourage handwashing behaviours. When piped running water is not available other methods can be used e.g. hanging container.
5. A handwashing facility with water and soap is good practice and single-use hand towels or dryers should be available. If not available air drying should be promoted. If this is not possible, an Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR), containing at least 60% alcohol, facility/dispenser should be made available. ABHR on wet hands is significantly less effective and should not be used as substitute for handwashing. Note that ABHR is less effective on visibly dirty hands and hands should be washed with water and soap after a few times of applying ABHR.

Good Hygiene Practice

6. Good practice guidance on handwashing practices should be followed – cues / prompts could be provided. Each handwash should last at least 20 seconds (scrubbing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds).
7. The provision of hardware at the workplace as well as embedding hygiene behaviour change amongst the workers, which should be encouraged by management, will help ensure sustained improvements in workplace hand hygiene. The integration of hygiene behaviour change session using attractive and fun activities directly link with people's emotions to practice key behaviours is necessary. The provision of visual cues, nudges and reminders around the workplace to prompt behaviours alongside simple effective attractive information will help reinforce social norms and changes in behaviours. Behaviour change promotion should focus on key behaviours including handwashing with soap.

Companies should be responsible for ensuring compliance with the above guidance and should also be responsible for hygiene behaviour change promotional programme around the importance of hand hygiene in the workplace. WASH4Work has resources to support with this. **Please visit www.wash4work.org**



¹ Define what the key touch point locations are: Toilets and urinals, hazardous materials, workplace cooking facilities and canteen, workplace accommodation.

² Hand hygiene refers to washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based rub containing at least 60% alcohol.

³ WASH pledge self-assessment tool for business recommends – 'Minimum 2 toilet seats and 2 urinal facilities per 45 male workers are provided in facilities'; and 'Minimum of 4 toilet seats per 50 females are provided within facilities'.

Resources:

ILO, 2016, *WASH@Work: a Self-Training Handbook* https://www.ilo.org/global/industries-and-sectors/utilities-water-gas-electricity/WCMS_535058/lang-en/index.htm (Accessed 07/10/20)

ILO, 2020, *Safe Return to work – Guide for employers on COVID-19 Prevention* https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_744033.pdf (Accessed 07/10/20)

ILO, 2020, *Policy Brief – Hand hygiene at the workplace: an essential occupational safety and health prevention and control measure against COVID-19* https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms_754864.pdf (Accessed 07/10/20)

UNICEF, 2020, *Fact sheet – Handwashing stations and supplies for the COVID-19 response* <https://www.unicef.org/media/75706/file/Handwashing%20Facility%20Worksheet.pdf> (Accessed 07/10/20)

WaterAid, 2020, *COVID-19 Guidance: Prioritising hygiene for workforce health and business resilience* <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/sites/g/files/jkxooof256/files/covid-19-guidance-prioritising-hygiene-for-workforce-health-and-business-resilience.pdf> (Accessed 07/10/20)

WBCSD, 2020, *WASH Pledge self-assessment tool for business* <https://www.wbcd.org/Programs/Food-and-Nature/Water/Resources/WASH-Pledge-Self-assessment-tool-for-business> (Accessed 15/10/20)

WHO-UNICEF, 2020, *Joint Statement – ‘To control COVID-19, we have to make hand hygiene accessible to all’* https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/sanitation-waste/sanitation/hand-hygiene-for-all-joint-statement.pdf?ua=1 (Accessed 07/10/20)

WHO, 2020, *Interim recommendations on obligatory hand hygiene against transmission of COVID-19*, <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/interim-recommendations-on-obligatory-hand-hygiene-against-transmission-of-covid-19> (Accessed 07/10/20)

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