

# HANDLE WITH CARE

## WHY HAND AND NAIL CARE MATTERS



Healthy skin and short, well-maintained nails are essential for effective hand hygiene.

### HEALTHY INTACT SKIN ACTS AS THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE AGAINST INFECTION

When the skin barrier is damaged (dryness, cracked skin, cuts) it creates conditions that increase microbial colonisation and transmission of pathogens to patients and surfaces.

- Hand hygiene protects the patient and healthcare worker, and relies on maintaining healthy skin.
- Broken skin creates niches that can harbour higher numbers of microorganisms, increasing the risk of transmission to others.
- Hand care while at work supports effective hand hygiene by maintaining healthy, intact skin.
- Incorrect or overuse of gloves can contribute to skin issues. Only wear gloves when required, not as a replacement for hand hygiene.
- Wash hands with cool or warm water only, and pat hands dry after washing instead of rubbing dry.

**Use moisturiser provided by the healthcare facility at least 3 times per shift to support optimal skin health.**

### SHORT NAILS IMPROVE THE EASE, SPEED & EFFECTIVENESS OF PROPER HAND HYGIENE

Studies have shown that healthcare workers with artificial nails and nail enhancements (acrylics, gels, shellac) are more likely to harbour gram-negative bacteria and yeasts on their fingertips.

- Infection outbreaks have been linked to healthcare workers with long or artificial, chipped or poorly maintained nails.
- Long fingernails and artificial nails trap more debris and retain biological material during patient care.
- Nails that extend beyond the fingertip and artificial nails create more hidden crevices for microbial growth, making proper hand washing and hand sanitiser use less effective.
- Longer fingernails increase the chance of glove puncture and patient injury, which can introduce pathogens and cause infection.

**Keeping nails short significantly reduces microbial load and improves hand hygiene effectiveness.**