

Hand Hygiene and Hand Washing Terms

A variety of hand hygiene and hand washing agents are available and a variety of terms are used to describe their benefits. They include (CDC, 2002a):

Alcohol-based hand rub – an alcohol-containing preparation designed for application to the hands for reducing the number of viable microorganisms on the hands. In the United States, such preparations usually contain 60%-95% ethanol or isopropanol.

Antimicrobial soap – soap (e.g, detergent) containing an antiseptic agent.

Antiseptic agent – antimicrobial substances that are applied to the skin in order to reduce the number of microbial flora. Examples include alcohols, chlorhexidine, chlorine, hexachlorophene, iodine, chloroxylenol (PCMX), quaternary ammonium compounds, and triclosan.

Antiseptic hand-wash – washing hands with water and soap or other detergents containing an antiseptic agent.

Antiseptic hand-rub – applying an antiseptic hand-rub product to all surfaces of the hands to reduce the number of microorganisms present.

Cumulative effect – a progressive decrease in the numbers of microorganisms recovered after repeated applications of a test material.

Decontaminate hands – to reduce bacterial counts on hands by performing antiseptic hand-rub or antiseptic hand-wash.

Detergent – detergents (surfactants) are compounds that possess a cleaning action. They are composed of both hydrophilic and lipophilic parts and can be divided into four groups: anionic, cationic, amphoteric, and nonionic detergents. Although products used for hand washing or antiseptic hand-wash in healthcare settings represent various types of detergents, the term "soap" is used to refer to such detergents in this guideline.

Hand antiseptis – refers to either antiseptic hand-wash or antiseptic hand-rub.

Hand hygiene – a general term that applies to either hand washing, antiseptic hand-wash, antiseptic hand-rub, or surgical hand antiseptis.

Hand washing – washing hands with plain (non-antimicrobial) soap and water.

Persistent activity – the prolonged or extended antimicrobial activity that prevents or inhibits the proliferation or survival of microorganisms after application of the product. This activity may be demonstrated by sampling a site several minutes or hours after application and demonstrating bacterial antimicrobial effectiveness when compared with a baseline level. This property also has been referred to as "residual activity." Both substantive and nonsubstantive active ingredients can show a persistent effect if they substantially lower the number of bacteria during the wash period.

Plain soap – detergents that do not contain antimicrobial agents or contain low concentrations of antimicrobial agents that are effective solely as preservatives.

Substantivity – substantivity is an attribute of certain active ingredients that adhere to the stratum corneum (i.e., remain on the skin after rinsing or drying) to provide an inhibitory effect on the growth of bacteria remaining on the skin.

Surgical hand antiseptis – antiseptic hand-wash or antiseptic hand-rub performed preoperatively by surgical personnel to eliminate transient and reduce resident hand flora. Antiseptic detergent

preparations often have persistent antimicrobial activity.

Visibly soiled hands – hands showing visible dirt or visibly contaminated with proteinaceous material, blood, or other body fluids (e.g., fecal material or urine).

Waterless antiseptic agent – an antiseptic agent that does not require use of exogenous water. After applying such an agent, the hands are rubbed together until the agent has dried.