

Health and Safety Office, NUI Galway

GUIDANCE NOTE

LABORATORY HAND WASHING FACILITIES AND HAND WASH TECHNIQUE

Hands must be washed after handling biohazardous materials and animals, and before leaving the laboratory. Despite this requirement many laboratory personnel don't wash their hands properly. Hand washing is the single most important procedure for preventing the spread of biological contamination. Hand washing should be conducted in a dedicated hand wash facility, which should include a sink with hot (and cold) supply, automated tap(s), liquid soap dispenser, exclusive paper-towel supply and waste towel receptacle. Here are some hand-washing tips and procedures for your use.

1. Consider the sink, including the taps, as contaminated and avoid direct contact with them.
2. With conventional taps turn water on using a paper towel and then wet your hands and wrists.
3. Work soap into a lather, vigorously rubbing together all surfaces of the lathered hands for 15 seconds. Friction helps remove dirt and micro-organisms. Wash around and under rings, around cuticles, and under fingernails. NOTE: The wearing of hand/wrist jewellery is not recommended in the laboratory as they can harbour infectious organisms.
4. Rinse hands thoroughly under a stream of water. Running water carries away dirt and debris. Point fingers down so water and contamination won't drip toward elbows.
5. Wipe excess water from hands and shake firmly but not wildly.
6. Dry hands completely with a clean dry paper towel.
7. If using conventional taps use a dry paper towel to turn water off.
8. To keep re-fillable soap from becoming a breeding place for micro-organisms, thoroughly clean soap dispensers before refilling with fresh soap. Better still, buy suitable individual, disposable soap dispensers.
9. When hand-washing facilities are not available at a remote work site, use an appropriate antiseptic, alcohol-based hand cleaner or hand rub or antiseptic towelettes, for lightly soiled hands. As soon as possible, re-wash hands with soap and running water.