

Infection Control for Instruments

In Terms of Hand Hygiene

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In Terms of Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene helps keep surface germs out of the face and mouth. “Hand hygiene” refers to all sanitary methods for hands. Since *sanitary* means *safe for intended use*, chosen **methods** must effectively reduce relevant germs to a level safe for use in each situation. “Achieve” and “reduce” are **action** verbs, and the reduction achieved by a C&D method is described as **action**. Actions of C&D are *cleaning, sanitary cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, and sterilizing*. They all have defined methods with strengths, weaknesses, functions, and purposes. Hand hygiene is familiar to most instrument handlers and offers helpful examples of C&D terms in action.

A person who is painting a fence over the weekend may occasionally hose off the hands to keep paint from spreading to unintended places. A rag and hand cleaner helps rub here or there to keep the hands from getting slippery, sticky, or crunchy. Washing with a hose, rag, and cleaner is *cleaning* for functional or mechanical purposes. It’s not enough for food, surgery, or touching the face or mouth, but it’s sanitary for painting a fence, cleaning the garage, and giving the dog a belly rub. At lunch, those hard-working hands are washed with soap and rinsed with clean water. This *sanitary cleaning* makes hands safe to touch others, go shopping, or eat lunch.

In professional foodservice, this is not enough. When our weekend warrior goes back to work at a pizza restaurant, they’ll use additional measures to protect diners. Making foods for strangers exposes them to germs of contagious disease, food prep and storage, and sanitary failures. Foodservice workers wear gloves as barriers to protect consumers. Out for delivery, our pizza pro has no access to soap and water, so the hands are rubbed with a hand sanitizer until dry. This is *sanitizing*, using a product labeled safe for use on hands or on food or drug preparation surfaces (as appropriate), and proven to reduce vegetative bacteria and some types of viruses, to levels the FDA calls safe. *Sanitizer* doesn’t kill everything, and rubbing it on doesn’t remove anything at all. Handwashing is best when soap and water are available. Since soap doesn’t kill everything either, professionals in service fields often perform both *sanitary cleaning* and *sanitizing* of the hands. Handwashing with *sanitizer* doesn’t work because water dilutes *sanitizer*, for a

weird wash without soap. *Cleaning* and *sanitizing* hands takes two steps.

The surgical scrub is an example of professional hand hygiene for a specific purpose. It layers sanitary cleaning with soap, sanitizing, and scrubbing with antiseptics to kill and remove as much as they can without damaging their skin. Medical procedures are named by [purpose] + [treatment]. Function and purpose may change, but action does not, so non-medical C&D is described by highest action, as in [*action*] + [*method*], with *details* and *basis* on file and display. We'd call this a [sanitizing] + [scrub], with "***ABC Stuff for 3 minutes,***" and we'd retain the ***SDS, instructions and who said to use it.*** It's *not disinfecting*, because pesticides are not to be used on living tissue, and it's *not sterilizing*, because that destroys all life, including the cells of hands. Since the surgical scrub is a professional tool, using enhanced hand hygiene, it's an E-Pro-HH.

C&D actions make items sanitary, or *safe for intended use*, and **methods** have limitations. Sterile gloves protect surgical patients from what *sanitary cleaning* and *sanitizing* the hands cannot. When instruments and gear cannot tolerate the preferred C&D methods to make them sanitary for playing and handling, we use other active response options too. QT, PIH, PPE, and HH protect players and handlers from what our available options cannot do. Just as hands may be treated, using different *methods* of appropriate *action*, to meet sanitary levels needed (to make hands safe for each situational use), other fomites can be managed with action methods to achieve sanitary levels too. Surgery requires sterility, but other interactions don't need to be sterile. Knowing where and when C&D action is needed or how far to go is as important as what the terms mean. Required sanitary levels for hands, surfaces, and even surgical tools, is defined by how critical their interaction with the body will be, in the Rational Approach to Disinfection.