Information Sheet G: Hand hygiene

Why is hand hygiene important?

The virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is spread by droplets from the mouth and nose. These droplets spread when we breathe, talk, cough, sneeze etc. Most of the droplets fall quickly to the nearest surface. If another person touches this surface, and then touches their mouth, nose or eyes, they can become infected with COVID-19. So it is important to clean your hands regularly, and avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.

Gloves are NOT a substitute for hand hygiene. The gloves will pick up virus if you touch a contaminated surface. You still need to avoid touching your face, and make sure you wash your hands when you remove your gloves.

Soap and water

- Use liquid soap and warm water. Dry your hands well.

- Ensure hand washing facilities are available in key areas e.g. toilets, catering areas, resident's rooms.

- Washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is essential at the following times:
    - on arrival at the care home
    - when leaving a resident's room
    - before contact with someone else
    - before eating
    - after removing any PPE
    - before and after smoking/vaping
    - after using the toilet
    - after contact with someone else
    - after contact with body fluids or contaminated surfaces
    - before leaving the care home
    - when you get home / to a resident's room

Alcohol-based hand rub
- Care homes will undertake a risk assessment to ensure it is safe to use, store or carry these in your setting.
- Use on hands that are visibly clean.
- Make sure hand rubs contain at least 60% alcohol.

Visitors

- Visitors need to clean their hands regularly too. Provide suitable facilities.
- Any visitors should wash their hands on arrival at the care home, often during their visit, and upon leaving.