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GUIDANCE

Behavioural science and disease prevention psychological guidance: Encouraging hand hygiene in the community

Hand hygiene is one of the most important measures to prevent Covid-19 transmission¹. The good news is that the World Health Organization has been successfully promoting hand hygiene globally since at least 2009, but high-income countries have not been a focus for this guidance until Covid-19. This document supplements other hand hygiene and behavioural science² guidance, and focuses specifically on psychological considerations and the behavioural science to support effective action.

We can intervene at individual, community, population, and system levels¹ to support effective hand hygiene, and through these interventions target the capabilities, opportunities and motivations³ for individuals to clean their hands.

Being clear about behaviours is essential⁴ and the ‘five moments for hand hygiene’ concept has increased effective hand hygiene in healthcare professionals⁵. It is crucial that people know *when*, *where* and *how* to clean their hands and *why* it is important.

Successful hand hygiene campaigns:

TEACH *When* and *how* to clean hands, using evidence-based information.

PROVIDE *opportunities* at the right moments through engaging and collaborating with people and organisations.

PROMOTE by working with communities.

PROMPT actions at the right times

Support individuals to **PREPARE** and **PLAN** their hand cleaning.

Success is also dependent on being clear and consistent about all protective behaviours, learning from experiences and adjusting strategies as necessary⁶. For example, if you are encouraging or mandating people to wear a face covering/mask, then you should include clear advice that before and at any time after touching a face covering/mask, individuals should clean their hands. Understanding how hand hygiene action relates to other actions in daily life with regards to the risk of germ transmission is critical for effective behaviour.

GUIDANCE

TEACH TO INFLUENCE CAPABILITY

Ensuring that people know how to clean their hands effectively and when to clean their hands.

Do not presume that people know when or how to clean their hands.

HOW TO CLEAN HANDS

Even healthcare professionals, who are taught step-by-step⁷, do not always know how or remember to clean their hands effectively. Consider the channels you can use to help people to learn how to clean their hands (e.g. through community leaders, schools, employers, social media). A one-off session is unlikely to lead to the change in behaviour required.

Inform people that how they clean their hands is important to protect themselves and others, and that they have to cover all areas of their hands. Circulate posters, videos, or other instructional materials that show how to use hand rub and how to clean hands with soap and water⁸. Find out who would influence your target audience, ask them who their role models are and try to engage them (it might even be someone they know well).

Consider supporting people in remembering how to clean their hands by including some suggestions for mental imagery. For example: 'Imagine that your soap is red paint and you want to make sure you get the paint all over your hands, fingers, thumb, nails and wrists, so all of your skin and nails are covered in paint; then wash it off'.

WHEN TO CLEAN HANDS

Identify 'moments of hand hygiene' for your community. Some moments in a person's day will carry higher risk for virus transmission. Understanding these moments is dependent on the flow of activities that will happen in a day.

Moments of hand hygiene that should be focused on:

A place where different elements of risk come together – people from outside one household or bubble.

The activity that involves touching items that others will have come into contact with.

The concept of 'moments' embraces the need to perform hand hygiene at such moments, exactly when this interaction takes place. This requires that a hand hygiene product (e.g. alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water) be easily accessible.

There are many possible moments and it is useful to group those considered most common in the community, to make them more memorable. These can be grouped as *home* moments, *public* moments and *personal* moments:

HOME MOMENTS

As you leave your home after the last thing you touch.

When you return home before you have touched anything.

After touching anything you have just brought into the home, like a parcel or letter.

PUBLIC MOMENTS

Before you enter a public place (like a bus, pub, supermarket) *before touching anything*.
Note that if you have not touched anything since you left home, and you cleaned your hands then, this gesture may be symbolic and necessary to assure others of safety (part of a local rule), rather than necessary.

After touching anything in a public place (e.g, supermarket shelves, a gate or a wall).

After you are leaving the public place *after the last thing you touch there*.

PERSONAL MOMENTS

Before and any time after you touch your face, whether a face covering/mask is worn or not.

After any time that you take your face covering/face mask off.

Before you prepare or eat food and after you have finished eating, wherever you have eaten

After using the toilet.

Before and after changing a nappy.

After sneezing/coughing (even into a tissue).

After touching animals.

Do not assume everyone knows to carry alcohol hand rub. This might be seen as an unnecessary cost to those who don't realise how important hand hygiene is.

1. PROVIDE AND PROMOTE TO INFLUENCE OPPORTUNITY

Having access to running water and soap or at least 60% alcohol hand rub. Being the norm to clean hands, making it socially acceptable to clean hands and socially unacceptable to not clean hands (at the right moments).

Make hand cleaning easy. Do not assume people have easy access to facilities to clean their hands in public spaces, at work or methods for hand drying.

CONSIDER HOW TO INFLUENCE PHYSICAL OPPORTUNITY

Discuss with schools, service providers and businesses how they are going to provide hand hygiene opportunities, at the 'moments of hand hygiene' with running water and soap and drying facilities or alcohol hand rub.

CONSIDER HOW TO INFLUENCE SOCIAL OPPORTUNITY

Consider creating a local hand hygiene movement, with pledges/commitments about hand hygiene, like the successful ‘antibiotic guardians’⁹ and ‘save lives clean your hands’¹⁰ campaigns in health care.

Consider using relationships with community leaders to create community role models of hand hygiene¹¹, remembering that different people will have different levels of credibility to different sections of the community.

2. PROMPT, PLAN AND PLEDGE TO INFLUENCE MOTIVATION

Thinking that hand hygiene is important and will lead to lower risk of infection to self and others; Having an identity of someone who practices good hand hygiene; Having routines and habits for hand hygiene and overcoming unconscious habits of skipping/omitting hand hygiene in new situations.

Do not presume that people have positive views of why they should clean their hands, have the confidence to do it properly at the right moments, or believe that soap and water or hand rub will protect them and their communities.

Communicate the impact of hand hygiene on outcomes that are relevant and meaningful for *members of your communities*. This might be different for different groups.

Add cues to remind people to clean their hands at the ‘moments of hand hygiene’ in public places and why this is necessary (e.g. written messages when leaving a public space). People stop seeing messages after they have been in place for a while, so consider changing these regularly.

Encourage people to leave cues/prompts/reminders for themselves and their families in their own homes and places of work to clean their hands considering the reasons why (e.g. a hand rub by the door to prompt hand hygiene after handling the post which has been handled by others).

Encourage individuals to view themselves as role models to their family, friends and communities by being able to cite why cleaning hands is important – repeating one or two simple, clear messages is enough to maintain the message.

Encourage people to form a specific commitment goal to clean their hands at the right times, in the right way, at the right places in order to keep their whole community safe¹².

Support people to develop plans that support effective hand hygiene¹³ and help to develop routines and habits. These should include:

- **Action plans:** Specify when, where and how hand cleaning will take place.
- **Implementation intentions:** If-then plans for hand cleaning (e.g. ‘If I am about to enter the door of the supermarket, then I will clean my hands with my hand rub before touching the door.’).

- **Contingency plans:** What to do if something gets in the way of hand cleaning (e.g. ‘If I can’t clean my hands immediately, then I will try not to touch anything with my hands or touch my face until I can do so.’)
- **Overcoming habit:** Highlighting habitual behaviours that might impact on hand hygiene (e.g. shaking hands) and finding alternative behaviours.

3. TARGET AUDIENCE FOR MESSAGING

Consider the target audience of your campaigns. For example, in order to be inclusive, your campaigns will need to be in plain language with high readability¹⁴ and may need to be tailored based on:

Occupation (what is the routine workflow and what exposure for touching surfaces others will have touched does the target audience have through their working day).

Home/family risk (what exposure for touching surfaces does the target audience have through their day and how might contamination in the home then occur. It is important to note that the moments of hand hygiene are also reliant on regular cleaning of surfaces).

Age (what is the developmental stage – e.g. messaging for primary school children may need to be different from those for adolescents and young adults).

Disabilities (what additional considerations are needed to support those with disabilities (e.g. learning disabilities, visual impairment).

Cultural background or languages spoken.

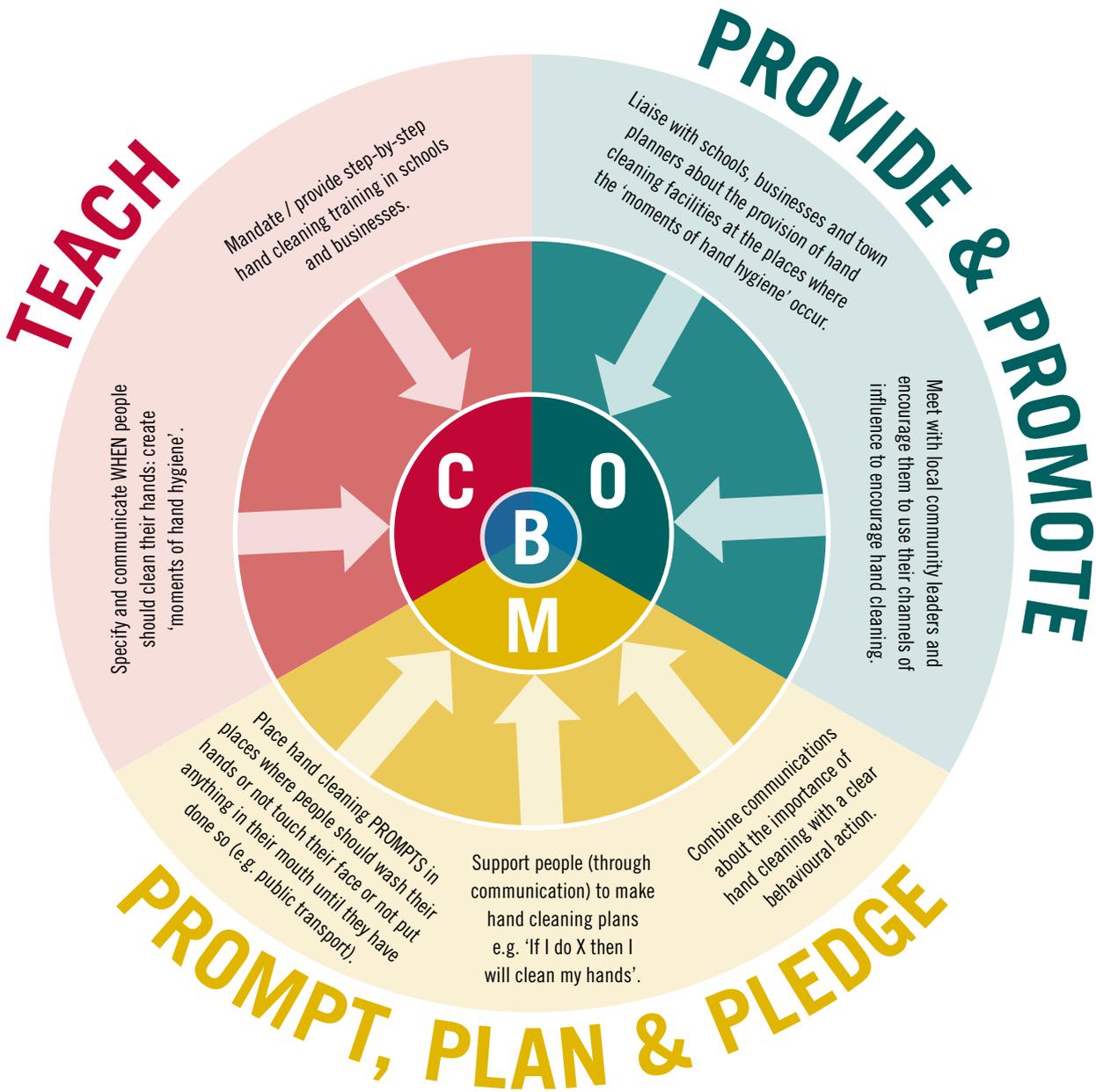
The human element of infection prevention actions. It is crucial to take an approach of understanding the barriers to why people don’t do hand hygiene actions and what impact they feel it is having on their life, like being embarrassed because an older family member thinks it is implying they are dirty.

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