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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### *Clean Hands, Better Health*

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) has been tracking hand hygiene compliance rates among its healthcare professionals and will begin publicly posting these rates, as part of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's (MOHLTC) public reporting of patient safety indicators initiative.

"Through participation in this program, and through our own initiatives, the MHA is focussing a great deal of attention on improving hand hygiene," Nancy Maltby-Webster, COO at the MHA, says. Hand hygiene relates to the removal of visible soil and the removal or killing of micro-organisms from the hands and may be accomplished using soap and running water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

Research shows that hand hygiene is the single most effective way to reduce the risk of Health care-Associated Infections (HAIs). An HAI is an infection that occurs in a patient during that patient's stay in the hospital.

Beginning in March 2008, hospitals across Ontario participated in a comprehensive MOHLTC training program called Just Clean Your Hands. Since that time, trained observers in hospital settings have been conducting hand hygiene audits (using a provincial audit tool) and recording what they see. With specific sample sizes based on hospital size, hospitals then report their compliance rates to the MOHLTC.

According to the Ontario Hospital Association, the collection and public reporting of these compliance rates will allow hospitals to establish a baseline from which to track hand hygiene improvement over time. Hospitals will use this information to identify areas for improvement and strategies for reducing the incidence of healthcare-associated infections.

Compliance rates that will be publicly reported show two areas of focus; one for compliance before initial patient / patient environment contact, and one which reflects compliance after patient/patient environment contact.

What the audit tool measures is not whether health care providers are washing their hands, but whether they are washing their hands at the right times, and in the right way. “Appropriate hand hygiene improves our compliance rate and that improves our rate of Health care-Associated Infections,” Yvonne Richardson, Infection Control Professional at the MHA, says.

Hand hygiene is only one of the indicators that the MHA uses to track its infection control measures. Additionally, the MHA monitors – and publicly reports on the MHA website – rates of bacterial infection, such as MRSA, C.Difficile and VRE, and other HAI rates. Data on hand hygiene compliance and other infection control practices and measures is available MOHLTC’s website at [www.ontario.ca/patientsafety](http://www.ontario.ca/patientsafety) and on the MHA website – [www.mhalliance.on.ca](http://www.mhalliance.on.ca)

“Hand hygiene involves everyone in the hospital, including patients,” Richardson says. “We encourage patients and their visitors to practice good hand hygiene both before and after contact with a patient and/or the patient’s environment, including clothes, bedding and personal items.”