

Statement on hand washing during a gastrointestinal disease outbreak

In 2006 Victoria had reported the largest number of gastrointestinal disease outbreaks since figures were collected. For the year, over 550 outbreaks were reported compared to approximately 200 on average in previous years.

Feedback to the Department of Human Services by staff investigating these outbreaks has suggested that the use of alcohol-based hand rubs, in some instances, were being used as the sole method of hand hygiene rather than as an adjunct to using soap and water.

It is important for all health care workers to be aware that:

“During an outbreak of gastroenteritis, regardless of the cause, hands must be washed using liquid soap and warm running water.

In some instances the use of an alcohol-based hand rub solution (with- or without chlorhexidine) may not be sufficient to remove transient microorganisms.

Therefore, it is important to wash your hands even if they appear visibly clean.

Alcohol-based hand rub solutions may be used after washing hands if desired.”