Topic 2.10. Basics of Personal Hygiene/ Основы личной гигиены

Personal hygiene is a set of practices that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases. It plays a crucial role in both individual well-being and public health. Proper hygiene reduces the risk of infections, supports the body's natural defences, and contributes to social comfort and confidence. In professional settings — especially in healthcare, food service, education, and laboratory work — adherence to hygiene standards is not only a matter of personal care but also a key component of occupational safety and quality control.

Hand Hygiene

Hand washing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the transmission of pathogens. Hands come into contact with numerous surfaces and can easily transfer bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms to the mouth, nose, eyes, and open wounds.

The correct hand-washing technique includes the following steps:

- Wet hands with clean, running water (warm or cold).
- Apply soap and lather thoroughly, covering all surfaces: palms, backs of hands, between fingers, under nails, and wrists.
- Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry hands completely with a clean towel or air dryer.

Critical moments for hand washing include: before eating or preparing food; after using the toilet; after coughing, sneezing, or blowing the nose; after contact with animals or animal waste; after handling garbage; and after touching potentially contaminated surfaces. In healthcare environments, the WHO "Five Moments for Hand Hygiene" model is widely applied to reduce healthcare-associated infections.

Alcohol-based hand sanitisers (with at least 60 % alcohol) are an acceptable alternative when soap and water are not available, but they are less effective on visibly dirty or greasy hands.

Body Hygiene

Regular bathing or showering removes sweat, dead skin cells, dirt, and microorganisms from the skin surface. It also helps to regulate skin flora and reduce unpleasant odours. Daily washing with mild soap and warm water is generally recommended, with special attention to areas prone to sweating and bacterial growth: underarms, groin, feet, and skin folds.

Proper drying after washing is equally important: damp skin can promote fungal and bacterial infections, especially between toes and in skin folds. Wearing clean, breathable clothing and changing it daily (or more often if soiled or wet) supports skin health and prevents irritation and infection.

Foot hygiene is particularly significant: washing feet daily, drying them thoroughly (especially between toes), and wearing clean socks and well-ventilated footwear help to prevent athlete's foot and other fungal infections. Regular nail care — keeping fingernails and toenails trimmed and clean — reduces the risk of harbouring pathogens and accidental skin injuries.

Oral Hygiene

Oral hygiene prevents dental caries, gingivitis, periodontitis, and bad breath. The main daily practices include:

- Brushing teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Cleaning between teeth daily with dental floss, interdental brushes, or water flossers.
- Using an antimicrobial mouthwash as an adjunct (not a replacement) for mechanical cleaning.
- Replacing toothbrushes every 3–4 months or sooner if bristles are frayed.
- Limiting sugary foods and drinks, which contribute to tooth decay.

Regular dental check-ups (at least once or twice a year) allow early detection and treatment of oral health issues. In professional contexts involving close contact with people (e.g., healthcare, teaching, hospitality), good oral hygiene also contributes to communication comfort and professional image.

Hair and Scalp Hygiene

Washing hair regularly with an appropriate shampoo removes excess sebum, sweat, dust, and dead skin cells. The frequency depends on hair type, lifestyle, and environmental conditions, but generally ranges from every 2–3 days to several times a week. Proper drying and combing help to keep hair clean and reduce the risk of scalp conditions such as dandruff or fungal infections. In some professions (e.g., food handling, surgery), hair must be restrained and covered to prevent contamination.

Respiratory Hygiene and Etiquette

Respiratory hygiene helps to limit the spread of airborne and droplet-transmitted infections (e.g., influenza, COVID-19, tuberculosis). Key practices include:

- Covering the mouth and nose with a tissue or the inner elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- Immediately discarding used tissues in a closed bin.
- Performing hand hygiene after contact with respiratory secretions.
- Staying home and seeking medical advice when experiencing symptoms of infectious illness.

In professional environments, these measures are part of standard infection prevention protocols and are especially critical in healthcare and educational institutions.

Hygiene in Specific Professional Contexts

In healthcare, personal hygiene is integrated into broader infection control measures. Healthcare workers must follow strict protocols for hand hygiene, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), safe handling of sharps, and proper disposal of waste. Clean uniforms or scrubs, hair restraints, and appropriate footwear are standard requirements.

In the food industry, hygiene practices are governed by food safety regulations. Employees must wash hands frequently, wear clean uniforms, use hairnets or caps, avoid jewellery, and report any illnesses that could compromise food safety. Regular training and audits ensure compliance with hygiene standards.

In laboratory and research settings, personal hygiene and protective measures prevent contamination of samples and protect personnel from hazardous materials. This includes wearing lab coats, gloves, eye protection, and following decontamination procedures.

Environmental and Household Hygiene

Personal hygiene extends to the immediate environment. Regular cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces (door handles, light switches, keyboards, mobile phones) reduce the risk of pathogen transmission. Proper waste disposal, ventilation, and control of moisture and pests also contribute to a healthy living and working environment.

Laundry hygiene is important: soiled clothes, towels, and bed linens should be washed regularly with appropriate detergents and at suitable temperatures, especially when contaminated with bodily fluids.

Common Pathways of Infection and How Hygiene Interrupts Them

Many infectious diseases spread through specific routes, and targeted hygiene practices can effectively break these chains of transmission:

- **Faecal–oral route**: prevented by thorough hand washing after using the toilet and before handling food, as well as by safe water and food handling practices.
- **Contact transmission** (direct or indirect): reduced by hand hygiene, cleaning surfaces, and avoiding sharing personal items (towels, razors, toothbrushes).
- **Respiratory droplets and aerosols**: mitigated by respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, and, when necessary, the use of masks.
- **Vector-borne transmission**: addressed partly through personal protection (e.g., using insect repellents, wearing long sleeves) and environmental control.

Understanding these pathways helps professionals choose the most effective hygiene measures for their specific work environment.

Basic Vocabulary for Professional Communication

English term	Meaning / Context
Personal hygiene	Practices to keep the body clean and healthy.
Hand hygiene	Washing hands or using alcohol-based sanitiser to remove pathogens.
Pathogen	A microorganism that can cause disease (bacteria, virus, fungus, parasite).

English term	Meaning / Context
Transmission	The process by which a pathogen spreads from one person or source to another.
Contamination	The presence of harmful substances or microorganisms on a surface or in a substance.
Decontamination	The process of removing or neutralising contaminants.
Infection control	Measures to prevent the spread of infections in healthcare and other settings.
Respiratory etiquette	Practices to reduce the spread of respiratory infections (covering coughs/sneezes, etc.).
Standard precautions	Basic infection prevention practices applied to all patients and situations.
PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)	Equipment such as gloves, masks, gowns, and goggles that protect against hazards.