Hand washing imperative to prevent infections and diseases

Hand hygiene an important part of infection prevention in hospital settings as well

New Delhi, 22 June 2017: According to a recent study, only 53% of the people in India wash hands with soap after defecation. Apart from this, only 38% and 30% wash their hands with soap before eating and preparing food, respectively. Washing hands after a visit to the washroom or before eating is a no-brainer. However, it is also an activity often ignored. Many people even do it wrong without understanding the health risks that contaminated hands can invite.

Diarrhoea and respiratory infections are the number one causes for child mortality in India. Research suggests that hand washing with soap can reduce the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases by about 40% and respiratory infections by 30%. Poor hand hygiene is responsible for a plethora of infections and diseases.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said "Poor hand hygiene can cause many other problems as we tend to touch other body parts too with the unclean hands. From common cold to an eye sty, one never knows what damage unclean hands can do to health. Contaminated hands can trigger feco-oral diseases like cholera and typhoid. This is more so during the rainy season when sanitation is poor and there are flies abound. Unclean hands can also lead to gastroenteritis, worm infestations, and jaundice. Hand washing with soap, inside out for about 10 to 15 seconds can guard you against various viral and bacterial diseases."

Unwashed hands are also a significant factor behind the high incidence of hospital-acquired infections. The IMA 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene approach define the key moments when health-care workers should perform hand hygiene. This evidence-based, field-tested, user-centered approach is designed to be easy to learn, logical and applicable in a wide range of settings. This approach recommends health-care workers to clean their hands before touching a patient, before clean/aseptic procedures, after body fluid exposure/risk, after touching a patient, and after touching patient surroundings.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "Hand hygiene is an important aspect of infection prevention and control programmes in hospital settings. It not only prevents patient infection but also reduces an
avoidable burden on health systems. All medical practitioners should ensure proper hand hygiene while attending to their patients. Even the nurses, attendants, and other staff working with them should wash their hand before dealing with the patients. This simple activity can help prevent over 50% hospital acquired infections.”

How should you wash your hands?

- Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air-dry them.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2,60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

For further information please contact:
Sanjeev Khanna - 9871079105
Md Adib Ahmad – 9873716235
hsgima@gmail.com
IMA Public & Media Advocacy Cell