

SESLHD PROCEDURE COVER SHEET



Health
South Eastern Sydney
Local Health District

NAME OF DOCUMENT	Bare Below the Elbows
TYPE OF DOCUMENT	Procedure
DOCUMENT NUMBER	SESLHDPR/343
DATE OF PUBLICATION	July 2024
RISK RATING	Medium
LEVEL OF EVIDENCE	National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard No. 3 'Preventing and Controlling Healthcare-Associated Infection (Criteria 3.1 and 3.8) NSW Health Policy Directives Level A and C evidence
REVIEW DATE	July 2027
FORMER REFERENCE(S)	'Hand Hygiene, Bare below the Elbows and Hand Care' procedure SESLHDPR/343 'Hand Hygiene and Hand Care' procedure SESLHNP/120 'Hand and wrist jewellery, nail polish and fingernail enhancements' policy SESLHNP/119
EXECUTIVE SPONSOR	Director Clinical Governance and Medical Services
AUTHOR	SESLHD Infection Prevention and Control Subcommittee
POSITION RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DOCUMENT	SESLHD Infection Prevention and Control Subcommittee SESLHD-InfectionControl@health.nsw.gov.au
FUNCTIONAL GROUP(S)	Infection Control
KEY TERMS	Bare below the elbows
SUMMARY	To outline the procedure to be followed to ensure staff implement bare below the elbows to reduce cross infection

COMPLIANCE WITH THIS DOCUMENT IS MANDATORY

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Procedure content cannot be duplicated.**

Feedback about this document can be sent to SESLHD-Policy@health.nsw.gov.au

1. POLICY STATEMENT

This procedure has been developed to instruct clinical staff across SESLHD the expectations to be bare below the elbows when attending to clinical care and performing hand hygiene. It has been developed in line with the National Hand Hygiene Initiative, Hand Hygiene Program by the Clinical Excellence Commission, NSW Ministry of Health Infection Control Policy Directive and National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard No. 3 - Preventing and Controlling Healthcare-Associated Infection, specifically Criterion 3.5.

2. BACKGROUND

The effectiveness of hand hygiene is improved when: skin is intact, nails are short and unvarnished, hands and forearms are free of jewellery, and sleeves are short or rolled securely up to the elbow.

2.1 DEFINITIONS

- **Fingernail enhancements:** includes, but is not limited to nail polish, artificial nails, tips, wraps, appliqués, acrylics, gels and any additional items applied to the nail surface
- **Hand and wrist jewellery:** includes wrist watches, bracelets and all rings, excluding a significant ring
- **Hand hygiene:** includes both hand washing with running water and either plain or antiseptic liquid soap or the use of alcohol-based hand rub or gel
- **Health Care Workers (HCWs):** persons, including students and trainees, whose activities involve contact with patients or with blood or body substances of patients
- **Microorganisms:** a microscopic form of life which can be bacterial, viral or fungal that may be capable of causing infection or disease
- **Significant ring:** One plain band ring
- **Zinger:** A clip with a retractable line to attach an ID badge or keys

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Employees will:

- Comply with bare below the elbows (no nail enhancements, no wrist jewellery, remove wristwatch during direct patient care, one significant plain ring permitted, rings with stones must be removed, rolled up or short sleeves, any breached skin must be covered with a waterproof occlusive dressing)

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3.2 Line Managers will:

- Set an example for hand hygiene practices according to the 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene and remain bare below the elbow when in the clinical setting.
- Monitor compliance with this procedure. An audit tool is available in QARS or Appendix 1.
- Manage staff who repeatedly do not comply with bare below the elbows in accordance with current NSW Health policies

3.3 District Managers/ Service Managers will:

- Provide support to line managers to mandate this procedure

4. BARE BELOW THE ELBOWS

- Natural fingernails are to be neatly manicured and extend no longer than the tip of the finger.
- HCWs, including volunteers and other personnel, entering a patient zone or providing patient care, staff working in other areas including sterilising service, food service, hotel service and laboratory settings must not wear: fingernail enhancements including nail polish, acrylic/gel nails, nail extensions or nail art or other adornments; hand and wrist jewellery (including watches), rings with large or multiple settings or detailed scrollwork
- One significant plain ring is acceptable. Rings with large or multiple settings or detailed scrollwork must not be worn during direct patient contact. If a plain ring is worn, the ring should be removed or "loosened" each time hand hygiene is performed. The area under the ring must be washed, rinsed and thoroughly dried if using soap and water particular attention to these areas and drying of hands including areas under ring should be considered when using ABHR
- **All** hand and wrist jewellery must be removed for all invasive procedures before performing hand hygiene, including preparation of aseptic or sterile field
- Prior to commencing a surgical hand scrub, HCWs must remove: all hand and wrist jewellery, including the significant ring.
- If, for cultural reasons hand or wrist jewellery cannot be removed, a risk assessment will need to be attended by the line manager in conjunction with Infection Prevention and Control.
- Staff wearing support bandages, splints or casts that cover any part of the hand cannot perform the **5 Moments for Hand Hygiene** when providing patient care and therefore must be found alternative duties until the support bandage, splint or cast is removed.
- Clothing that extends below the elbows must be removed or sleeves rolled up to the elbows during direct patient care. Patient gowns must not be worn over uniforms at any time.
- Compliance with bare below the elbow has been linked with increased rates of hand hygiene and uniform compliance.

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5. NON COMPLIANCE

- Non-compliance will be managed as per [SESLHDPR/415 – Performance and Talent](#)

6. DOCUMENTATION

Not required.

7. AUDIT

1. Bling audit (Bare Below the Elbow) See [Appendix 1](#)

8. REFERENCES

- [Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare \(2023\). National Hand Hygiene Initiative \(NHHI\) Implementation Guide. Sydney: ACSQHC.](#)
- [Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare: National Safety and Quality Service Standards. 2019 \(Standard No. 3, Criterion 3.8\)](#)
- [National Health and Medical Research Council \(2019\) Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.](#)
- [Clinical Excellence Commission \(2020\) Infection Prevention and Control Practice Handbook](#)
- [What is Bare Below the Elbows. Centre for Healthcare Related Infection Surveillance and Prevention & Tuberculosis Control. Queensland Government](#)
- Szumska E, Czajkowski P, Zablocki M, Rozkiewicz D. A Multifaceted Approach to the “Bare below the Elbow” Concept and Hand Hygiene Compliance among Healthcare Professionals- Multicenter Population- Based Study. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2023 Mar 2;20(5):4435. doi: 10.3390/ijerph20054435. PMID: 36901445; PMCID: PMC10002297. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36901445/>
- [SESLHDPR/415 - Performance and Talent](#)

9. VERSION AND APPROVAL HISTORY

Date	Version	Version and approval notes
Mar 2014	0	Developed by Belinda Straube, CNC Infection Control and Infection Prevention Working Party. Procedure supersedes ‘Hand Hygiene and Hand Care’ procedure SESLHNP/120 ‘Hand and wrist jewellery, nail polish and fingernail enhancements’ policy SESLHNP/119
Apr 2014	0	Revised and re-formatted by District Policy Officer. Also added References to National Safety and Quality Service Standards, Hand Hygiene Program (CEC), National Hand Hygiene Initiative.
Jun 2014	1	Further changes made by Infection Prevention Control Working Party.
Jun 2014	1	Approved by CQC

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June 2018	1	Major Review endorsed by Executive Sponsor
July 2018	1	Endorsed by SESLHD Clinical & Quality Council
June 2021	2	Minor revision. References only updated. Approved by Executive Sponsor.
24 July 2024	2.1	Minor review. References only updated. Approved by SESLHD Infection Prevention and Control Committee.

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Appendix 1 'Bling' Audit (Bare Below the Elbow)

FACILITY AND DEPARTMENT.....

DATE:.....TIME.....OBSERVER.....

HCW:				HCW:			
RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)		RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)	
NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial		NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial	
WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other	WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other
CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other	CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other
HCW:				HCW:			
RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)		RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)	
NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial		NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial	
WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other	WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other
CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other	CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other
HCW:				HCW:			
RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)		RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)	
NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial		NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial	
WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other	WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other
CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other	CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other
HCW:				HCW:			
RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)		RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)	
NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial		NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial	
WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other	WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other
CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other	CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other
HCW:				HCW:			
RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)		RINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> none or 1 sig	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 1 +/-or stone (s)	
NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial		NAILS	<input type="checkbox"/> S&C	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish or artificial	
WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other	WRIST	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> watch	<input type="checkbox"/> other
CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other	CLOTHING	<input type="checkbox"/> BBE	<input type="checkbox"/> long sleeve	<input type="checkbox"/> other

KEY:

Nails: **S & C**- Short and Clean

Clothing: **BBE**- Bare below elbows