

Examination gloves: “You have to use gloves correctly if you want to prevent infections”

Interview

Prof Dr Günter Kampf,
Specialist for hygiene and
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At a glance

- Along with hygienic hand disinfection, medical gloves are an essential measure for infection control.
- Medical staff needs to know clinical examples in which gloves are not necessary, and others in which disposable or sterile gloves are indicated.
- Hand hygiene should be performed when necessary regardless of glove use.

Independent specialist for hygiene and environmental medicine Prof Dr Günter Kampf advises hospitals, physicians' practices, producers of medical products and disinfectants on questions of hospital and practice hygiene. He has published numerous articles in international trade specialised journals. Kampf is adjunct Professor of Hygiene and Environmental Medicine at the University of Greifswald, Germany.

The WHO “Glove Pyramid” recommends when gloves should be worn and when not (Link via QR code). Is there any uncertainty about this in practice?

Kampf: The upper part of the pyramid concerns the wearing of sterile gloves. There is no confusion about this in practice, as these processes are established and standardised. However, the situation is different with regard to non-sterile examination gloves. People are still somewhat uncertain about when gloves should be worn, when not, and – above all – when they should be taken off. Although hospitals have hygiene plans, employees do not always follow the recommended guidelines. Instead, they often adopt the behaviour of their supervisors or follow their own instincts. Once certain behaviours become familiar and an established part of a routine, such habits are very difficult to change again. You need to increase awareness and provide practical training to improve behaviours and establish new patterns.

When should examination gloves be worn – and when not?

Kampf: HCP's tend to wear gloves even when it is not necessary, or they leave them on although an indication is no longer present. According to a study, only one third of all worn gloves are used according to the indication. This is critical for two reasons: First, excessive wearing of gloves can be harmful to the skin health of users. Second, it impairs compliance to hand disinfection. Various studies have shown that wearing gloves correlates with a lower compliance of hand disinfection. And in the end, this harms patients.

Do gloves offer the user full protection from contamination of their hands and the associated risk of infection?

Kampf: It is quite well documented that gloves do not provide full protection. Wearing disposable gloves keeps the majority of microorganisms away from the hands, but a certain percentage of bacteria can be found there despite the gloves. There are two possible explanations. Firstly, gloves are not completely impermeable. Secondly, employees can contaminate their hands with anything on the outside of the gloves if they are not removed skillfully. (...) [In this context] it is always recommended to disinfect your hands after taking off medical gloves.

Find the WHO
„Glove Pyramid“ here:

