OSCE checklist for hand washing

An OSCE checklist for hand washing covers when to clean your hands, getting every part of the hands wet and covered with soap, rinsing, drying and turning off the tap without recontaminating. Practise it until it runs on its own.

OSCE checklist for hand washing: steps to practise

1. Take off wrist watch and rings, and check your sleeves are clear of the wrists. Cover cuts with a waterproof dressing.
2. Check the sink, soap and paper towels are available before you start.
3. Wet your hands under running water at a comfortable temperature.
4. Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces.
5. Rub palm to palm, then the back of each hand, between the fingers, the backs of the fingers, each thumb, the fingertips and finally the wrists.
6. Rinse under running water.
7. Dry thoroughly with a disposable towel, including between the fingers.
8. Turn off the tap with the towel if it is hand operated, then bin the towel without touching the lid.
9. Say when you would use alcohol hand rub instead: hands not visibly dirty or soiled, and when your policy allows it.
10. Say when hands must be washed with soap and water, such as when they are visibly dirty or after contact with some infections.

What candidates commonly forget

- Thumbs, fingertips and wrists, which are easily missed.
- Jewellery and nail varnish or long nails, which the exam may count as a hygiene fault.
- Touching the tap or bin lid with clean hands.
- Saying *when* to clean hands (before touching a patient, before a clean or aseptic task, after body fluid risk, after touching the patient, after touching their surroundings), not only how.

- Rushing. A quick rinse is not a full technique.

Local policy comes first

This is our own practice checklist. Your college, hospital or country may do some steps differently. Where local policy and this list disagree, follow local policy. How long to rub, and which moments your policy lists, are set by your own guideline, so learn that version. You can practise with an AI patient, and try one station free with no sign-up. See also the general OSCE nursing checklist.

Common questions

What is the OSCE checklist for hand washing?

Remove jewellery, wet, soap, rub every surface including thumbs, fingertips and wrists, rinse, dry with a disposable towel and avoid touching taps or bins with clean hands. Add the times when you must clean your hands.

Should I wash with soap or use hand rub in an OSCE?

Use alcohol rub when hands are not visibly dirty and your policy allows it. Wash with soap and water when hands are visibly dirty or soiled. Say which one you choose and why.

Do I need to say the five moments aloud?

It helps. Linking each hand clean to a moment shows safe practice, as long as it matches the version your course teaches.

Sources

- WHO guidelines on hand hygiene in health care
- WHO: hand hygiene in health care
- NICE QS61: Infection prevention and control

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.