

Portable handwashing sinks guidelines for personal service establishments and care facilities

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Purpose

These guidelines provide a resource for Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and the public on the proper use of portable handwashing sinks in public premises. The requirements apply to portable sinks used in personal service establishments and care facilities. Portable handwashing sinks are intended solely for handwashing and must not be used for any other purpose.

Rationale

Portable handwashing sinks may be used where fixed plumbing is not available or cannot be installed. Handwashing sinks are essential for maintaining and promoting proper hand hygiene in personal service establishments to prevent the spread of pathogenic microorganisms, where workers handle equipment and clients frequently. Because of the importance of maintaining hand hygiene in these settings, portable handwashing sinks may be approved by an EHO under certain circumstances. A portable handwashing sink must be cleaned and disinfected regularly because it can become contaminated with pathogens, support biofilm growth, and contaminate users. The sink must always be operational when service is provided in the facility.



Requirements for setting up a portable handwashing sink

For a portable handwashing sink to be considered acceptable, the following requirement must be met:

- **Location and accessibility:**
 - The portable handwashing sink must be adjacent to the workstations in personal service establishments or near the diaper-changing station in care facilities.
 - Use portable handwashing sinks for handwashing only. Do not use them to reprocess equipment or wash dishes.
- **Water supply and temperature:**
 - The handwashing sink must be supplied with clean, potable, running hot and cold water.
 - It is recommended to use hands-free (automatic) water dispensing to reduce the risk of cross-contamination.
- **Soap and hand drying:**
 - Liquid or foam soap must be provided in a dispenser to prevent contamination.
 - Paper towels or hand dryers must be provided for drying hands. These must be placed near the sink for easy access.
 - If cloth towels are used, they must be laundered after each use. Attending EHO must approve usage.
- **Paper towel waste disposal:**
 - The sink must be equipped with a waste disposal receptacle (trash bin) to collect used paper towels or waste. Ensure that the trash bin is lined with a bag and regularly emptied to avoid overflow or contamination.



- **Sanitation plan:**

- Clean and disinfect the sink daily, including the faucet, soap dispenser, and surrounding areas.
- Ensure that the potable water holding tank is emptied, cleaned, disinfected, and refilled with potable water daily or as needed.
- The grey water holding tank must be emptied, cleaned and disinfected frequently.

- **Training for staff:**

- Staff must know how to use and maintain the portable handwashing sink. They should know how to clean, disinfect, and fill the potable water holding tank, and how to empty, clean and disinfect the grey water holding tank.



Written procedure requirement

Facility operators must provide a written procedure for maintaining and operating a portable handwashing sink in their facility to the inspecting EHO. The written procedure must include, but is not limited to the following items:

- A verification process and frequency to confirm the sink and its components are visibly clean and in good working condition. Components include basins, faucets, taps, water lines, traps, drains, fittings, pumps, hot water heater, potable water holding tanks, grey water holding tanks and general finishes.
- A process for maintenance and cleaning of any identified deficiencies. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use, particularly on using a cleaner or disinfectant on components of the sink.
- The process and frequency for stocking the sink with necessary supplies, such as liquid soap in a dispenser, single-use paper towels, brushes, cleaner and disinfectant.
- The process for monitoring and filling the potable water holding tank with potable water, how the fill area will be kept sanitary, and for cleaning the tank.
- The process and frequency for monitoring and emptying the grey water holding tank as needed. Grey water must be emptied in a sanitary sewer or drain. Dumping of grey water on the ground or in a storm sewer is not permitted. Include the process for cleaning and disinfecting the tank.
- Documentation that hot and cold running potable water are always available.



References

Alberta Health Services. (2018). *Sink Requirements for Special Events*.
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-sink-requirements-for-special-events.pdf>

Alberta Health Services. (2020). *Written Procedures-Personal Services*.
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eph-written-procedure-templates-personal-services.pdf>

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2025, June 3). *Clean your hands to help reduce the spread of infectious diseases*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/healthy-living/hand-hygiene.html>

Public Health Ontario. (n.d.). *Hand Hygiene*.
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Health-Topics/Infection-Prevention-Control/Hand-Hygiene>



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