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**Minister for Health and Ageing**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**New Hand Hygiene Initiative Aims to Reduce Infections**

A new hand hygiene initiative has been launched today in a bid to reduce the antibiotic-resistant 'superbug' patient infections in hospitals.

The National Hand Hygiene Initiative coincides with the World Health Organization's (WHO) *Save lives: Clean your hands Day*.

Today is a very important day and a very important message from the WHO given the current developing situation around the world with swine flu.

Today we are encouraging all people to undertake one simple step – clean your hands regularly.

In Australia, this world-first hand hygiene initiative is a step-by-step program to improve hand hygiene in hospitals and other health services.

It follows on from groundbreaking Australian research that shows using alcohol-based hand rub is the single most effective treatment in controlling *Staphylococcus aureus* blood stream infections (SAB), including the Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) or 'golden staph' infections.

The program also aims to monitor hand hygiene practices and compliance among healthcare workers.

Australia's National Hand Hygiene Initiative is being implemented by Hand Hygiene Australia.

\$4 million over three years from the Australian Government has been provided to support the program and other initiatives of Hand Hygiene Australia.

I'd like to congratulate the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare and Hand Hygiene Australia for this important health initiative that will save the lives of patients across our entire health care system.

If all health professionals used the 15 second alcohol-based hand rub regime, the rates of blood stream infection will be halved resulting in the potential to save lives.

Whilst the initial focus of the program is on acute-care hospitals, Hand Hygiene Australia resources will be available for all public and private healthcare facilities.

The program will have clear national guidelines for hand hygiene. It also includes an online education program to inform all healthcare workers about infection control and hand hygiene.

While the world is on alert for swine flu, this is a timely reminder that good hygiene helps stop the spread of many diseases in our community and in our hospitals.

**For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.**