

# “Nurses and Midwives: clean care is in your hands”: The 5th May 2020 World Health Organization *SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands* campaign

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In honor of Florence Nightingale's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared 2020 the “Year of the Nurse and Midwife”. In addition to championing the nursing profession, Nightingale's role was also fundamental for the recognition of the importance of infection prevention and control (IPC), as she was among the first to recognize that a caregiver could transmit germs, and thus cause patient harm. Nurses and midwives make up nearly 50% of the global health workforce,<sup>1</sup> and are the group

of healthcare workers that have the most frequent contact with patients. This makes them pivotal figures in the fight against healthcare-associated infections (HAI) as well as neonatal and maternal sepsis.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020, for the annual celebration of the *SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands* campaign, WHO will focus on the essential role that nurses and midwives play in contributing to saving millions of lives each year by championing clean care. Despite

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many improvements around the world, rates of HAI remain unacceptably high, and the majority of them are transmitted by healthcare workers' hands. Therefore, hand hygiene promotion strategies must be constantly reinforced and improved. Clean healthcare has recently been recognized by WHO as one of the most urgent challenges to be tackled by the global community over the next ten years.<sup>2</sup> Actively engaging the expertise of nurses and midwives in the development, implementation and evaluation of hand hygiene promotion contributes to clean healthcare.

Along with recognizing the critical importance of nurses and midwives to patient care, the aim of the "Year of the Nurse and Midwife" is also to highlight that there is a major global shortage of healthcare workers, and that more than half of the shortage is of nurses and midwives.<sup>1</sup> WHO estimates that for countries to succeed in reaching the Sustainable Development Goal # 3 on health and well-being, the world will need an additional 9 million nurses and midwives by the year 2030.<sup>1</sup> It has been proven that investing in education and job creation in the health and social sectors will result in improved health outcomes, global health security, and economic growth.<sup>1</sup> Having adequate healthcare worker staffing reduces the

risk of HAI and antimicrobial resistance, and is thus recommended by WHO as a core component of effective IPC programmes.<sup>3</sup>

It is crucial to recognize both the work and the immense responsibility that nurses and midwives carry: we cannot achieve Universal Health Coverage without investing in them. Everyone, including policy makers, healthcare workers, and patients themselves, can contribute to improving hand hygiene and preventing infections (Table I).

Please join us in celebrating this vital and often underappreciated group of HCW; "Nurses and Midwives: CLEAN CARE is in YOUR HANDS"!

*The May 5, 2020, World Health Organization SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands campaign slogan and main promotional image (2020 hashtags: #HandHygiene #InfectionPrevention #YONM #SupportNursesAndMidwives #Nurses2020 #Midwives2020 #HealthForAll). Campaign participants are invited to submit photos or selfies of them holding a board with the slogan and hashtags at [www.CleanHandsSaveLives.org](http://www.CleanHandsSaveLives.org) Notes*

**Table I. The 5 May 2020 World Health Organization SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands Campaign Calls to Action**

Campaign Participants	Call to Action
Nurses	"Clean and safe care starts with you."
Midwives	"Your hands make all the difference for mothers and babies."
IPC leaders	"Empower nurses and midwives in providing clean care."
Policy makers	"Increase nurse staffing levels to prevent infections and improve quality of care. Create the means to empower nurses and midwives."
Patients and families	"Safer care for you, with you."

Abbreviations: IPC, infection prevention and control; WHO, World Health Organization.



Figure May 5, 2020: "Nurses and Midwives, clean care is in your hands!"

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### All authors

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