



Q&A with SVEMA

MAKING SENSE OF

HAND HYGIENE 

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2025



Q&A with Sajeela Khan Akhonzada, Country Manager UK & Ireland & Infection Prevention Specialist, SVEMA

Introduction

Hand hygiene remains one of the most effective — and most underestimated — controls in workplace health and safety. While awareness has increased since COVID-19, real-world performance still falls short. In many environments, [compliance often sits below 50%](#), despite clear evidence that [effective hand hygiene can prevent up to 50%](#) of avoidable infections.

At the same time, the business impact is significant. In the UK alone, sickness absence results in **148.9 million** working days lost each year, placing ongoing pressure on productivity and operational continuity.

This gap between awareness and execution highlights a critical issue: hand hygiene is not a product problem — it's a system design challenge.

So **what does good hand hygiene actually look like today?** And how can organisations translate policy into consistent, effective practice?

To explore these questions, Arrow County Supplies spoke with **Sajeela Khan Akhonzada**, Country Manager UK & Ireland and Infection Prevention Specialist at SVEMA.

Why Does Hand Hygiene Remain a Critical Workplace Risk — Even After COVID-19?

"Hand hygiene remains one of the most effective and cost-efficient infection prevention measures available. Although COVID-19 increased awareness, the underlying risk landscape has not diminished.

Workplaces continue to face seasonal influenza, respiratory infections and norovirus — which accounts for an estimated 3 million cases annually in the UK.

What has changed is expectation. Staff, patients and the public now expect visible, credible hygiene standards supported by evidence-based solutions rather than minimum compliance measures.

Organisations that maintain robust hand hygiene systems protect health, reduce absenteeism and strengthen operational resilience."

How Does Hand Hygiene Directly Affect Staff Wellbeing, Confidence and Productivity?

“Effective hand hygiene reduces infection transmission, which directly lowers absenteeism and workplace disruption. However, wellbeing is also shaped by how protected and confident staff feel in their environment.

A critical — and often overlooked — factor is skin integrity. High-frequency hand hygiene can lead to dryness, irritation and occupational dermatitis.

This isn't just a comfort issue. Evidence shows that skin irritation can reduce compliance by up to **25%**, directly impacting infection control outcomes.

When organisations prioritise skin-friendly, effective formulations, long-term compliance improves — supporting both wellbeing and productivity.”

What Role Does Hand Hygiene Play in Health, Safety and Governance Compliance?

“Hand hygiene is a core component of an organisation's duty of care, supporting compliance across:

- Occupational health and safety
- Infection prevention and control
- Public health protection
- Risk management and governance
- Business continuity planning

In regulated sectors such as healthcare, care homes, education and food production, hygiene standards are embedded within inspection frameworks and aligned with [WHO Guidelines](#). Increasingly, hygiene performance is also linked to ESG, wellbeing and corporate responsibility objectives.”

Where Do Workplace Hand Hygiene Systems Commonly Fail?

“The most common mistake is assuming that providing products automatically leads to compliance.

In reality, compliance often fails because the system around those products is poorly designed. Typical challenges include:

- Poor placement of hygiene points
- Inconsistent replenishment
- Lack of behavioural reinforcement
- Products that discourage use
- Limited monitoring or auditing

Compliance fatigue is also common — standards often decline over time despite ongoing risks. Effective organisations treat hand hygiene as a continuous operational system, not a static intervention.”

What Does Best Practice Look Like Today?

“Best practice is strategic, visible and risk-based.

A modern system includes:

- Accessible hygiene infrastructure
- Skin-friendly, high-efficacy formulations
- Clear behavioural guidance and training
- Risk-based product selection
- Ongoing monitoring and review
- Integration into wider infection prevention systems

User experience plays a critical role. Even the most effective product will underperform if it is uncomfortable or unsuitable for frequent use.”

Why Is a One-Size-Fits-All Approach No Longer Fit for Purpose?

“Different environments carry different risks and require tailored solutions.

Leading organisations are moving towards sector-specific hygiene strategies aligned to real operational needs.

Examples include:

- Industrial environments: powerful yet skin-safe cleansers (SVEMA Nature Range)
- Healthcare: fragrance-free, high-frequency, skin-compatible systems
- Food production: HACCP-aligned contamination control
- Public-facing environments: mild or fragranced soaps that encourage use”

How Should Organisations Select the Correct Hand Hygiene Solutions for Their Environment?

“In many organisations, inconsistent product selection contributes directly to poor outcomes — with real-world hand hygiene [compliance often still sitting below 50%](#), despite clear guidance and policies.

Key factors to consider include:

- Contamination risk level
- Frequency of hand hygiene
- Skin health and user tolerance
- Regulatory and compliance requirements
- Operational environment and workflow
- Product efficacy and certification standards
- Sustainability and environmental impact

Product choice plays a critical role in long-term success. Research shows that factors such as availability, usability and skin compatibility significantly influence behaviour — [with over 95% of staff identifying access to appropriate products as a key driver of compliance](#).

In practice, the most effective solutions balance performance, usability and user acceptance. Organisations that take a consultative, system-led approach are far more likely to implement solutions that are not only compliant on paper, but sustainable and effective in everyday use.”

Which Sectors Face Hidden or Underestimated Hand Hygiene Risks?

“Several sectors carry significant — and often overlooked — hand hygiene risks, particularly those operating outside highly regulated environments.

While healthcare and food production have well-defined hygiene frameworks, many other workplaces involve high levels of contact and shared interaction without the same level of structured control, including:

- Healthcare hygiene audits
- HACCP food safety systems
- Care quality inspection standards
- Workplace health and safety compliance
- Internal governance and ESG reporting

Modern infection prevention relies on structured compliance systems, supported by:

- Regular auditing
- Training and competency verification
- Usage monitoring and feedback

The impact of these systems is clear. Studies show that implementing structured monitoring, training and feedback programmes can [increase compliance rates from around 49% to over 86%, while also reducing infection rates.](#)

Even targeted interventions such as observation and feedback alone have been shown to [improve compliance by 10–30% or more over time.](#)

This is why leading organisations are moving beyond static policies and towards active, data-driven hygiene management, embedding monitoring and accountability into everyday operations.

Those that do so are far better positioned to maintain consistent standards, demonstrate compliance and drive continuous improvement.”

How Can Organisations Build Long-Term Resilience Through Better Hand Hygiene?

“The biggest shift required is mindset.

Hand hygiene should be viewed as a strategic investment in workforce health and organisational resilience — not simply a compliance exercise.

Leading organisations:

- Prioritise prevention
- Invest in skin-friendly systems
- Embed behavioural change
- Continuously measure performance

In Summary

Effective hand hygiene is no longer just a compliance requirement — it is a strategic driver of workforce health, operational resilience and long-term performance.

With millions of working days lost to illness each year and workplace health costing UK organisations billions, the shift from reactive measures to preventative systems has never been more important.

The organisations seeing the greatest success are those that adopt a system-led approach — combining effective formulations, skin compatibility, smart placement and ongoing behavioural reinforcement.

To explore how this can be applied across your organisation, take a closer look at the full range of SVEMA and [Andarta®](#) hand hygiene and skincare solutions available from Arrow County Supplies.

EXPLORE SVEMA & ANDARTA® RANGE