

# 90% fewer women died when doctors washed their hands.

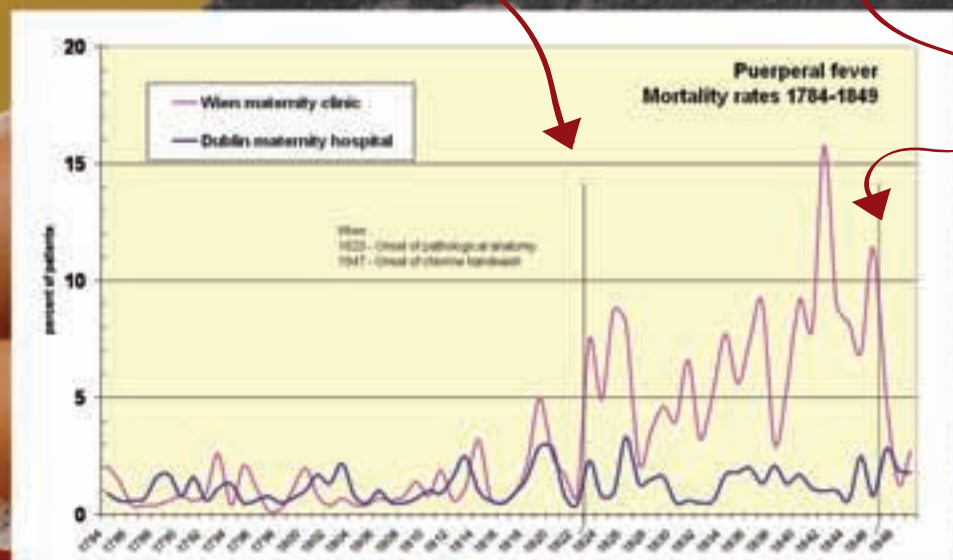
During the 19th century, up to 25% of women who delivered their babies in hospitals died of childbed fever. By the 1840's some doctors, like Oliver Wendell Holmes, observed that deliver rooms staffed by doctors and medical students had a mortality rate three times that of the rooms staffed by midwives. They guessed that students, whose duties included direct contact with sick patients, were unknowingly carrying something that spread the fever. As a countermeasure he began washing his hands with chlorinated solution before delivering babies. The mortality rate in maternity wards eventually dropped to less than one percent.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes

**VERY CONTROVERSIAL**

1823 Wein hospital starts autopsies

1848 Wein begins hand washing



Source: 1. Access Excellence, National Health Museum: [http://www.accessexcellence.org/AE/AEC/CC/hand\\_background.php](http://www.accessexcellence.org/AE/AEC/CC/hand_background.php)

Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis