



If you are a visitor or a carer

There are a range of actions visitors and carers can take to minimise the risk of giving a patient an infection or catching an infection from healthcare facilities.

For example:

- Do not visit someone in a healthcare facility if you feel unwell, have a cold, have been vomiting or have had diarrhoea recently. Wait until you feel better.
- Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands well with soap and water or by applying an alcohol-based handrub to the surface of hands:
 - after entering a healthcare facility and when you leave the facility
 - before touching a patient or their food
 - after you leave a patient's room.
- Be careful not to touch dressings, drips or other equipment around hospital beds.
- Avoid bringing a large number of people at one time to visit someone. Always check visiting arrangements with the healthcare worker.
- Do not use the patient's toilet or bathroom, use the visitor facilities.
- You may be asked to wear gloves and an apron or gown when visiting a patient in a healthcare facility. Follow instructions provided by healthcare workers about any extra precautions that may be needed.

Do you need to do anything different when you go home?

It is important to maintain good personal hygiene including good hand hygiene practices (especially after going to the toilet) after you leave the healthcare facility.

Your healthcare worker will let you know if anything else is required before you are discharged.

Where can I get more information on Healthcare-Associated Infections?

You, your family or your carer can get further information from your healthcare worker or from the resources listed below.

For more information:

This brochure is based on the *Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare*.

For further information visit:
www.nhmrc.gov.au
www.safetyandquality.gov.au

Contact:

National Health and Medical Research Council
GPO Box 1421, Canberra ACT 2601
P: 13 000 NHMRC (13 000 64672)
P: +61 2 6217 9000 for international callers.
Please let us know if you need an interpreter.
E: nhmrc@nhmrc.gov.au

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Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

Healthcare-Associated Infections

Information for patients,
visitors and carers



AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

What are Healthcare-Associated Infections?

Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAIs)

are infections that occur as a result of visiting, or receiving treatment in, a healthcare facility. Many HAIs are preventable and can occur from treatment provided at a range of healthcare facilities, including hospitals, general practitioner clinics, dental clinics, podiatry clinics, nursing homes or other places where healthcare is delivered.

Who is at risk of HAIs?

The risk of getting these types of infections depends on several factors including:

- how healthy you are
- the type of healthcare facility you are in and the length of your stay
- the procedure(s) you have undergone
- certain medications/antibiotics you may be taking.

How do HAIs spread?

Many HAIs are caused by bacteria. Infection-causing bacteria found in healthcare facilities come mostly from human sources, including patients, healthcare workers and visitors. The bacteria can also be found on medical equipment or the environment more generally such as from benchtops and door handles. Infection occurs when the bacteria enters the body and the immune system is unable to eliminate them. People who may be at increased risk of getting an infection include those with a weakened or immature immune system, a chronic condition or people who have undergone surgical or medical procedures.

Some infections can be treated easily with antibiotics. However, there are some infections such as those caused by Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE) and *Clostridioides difficile* that are more difficult to treat because they are resistant to certain antibiotics.

What will happen when you are in a healthcare facility?

If you have an infection caused by a multi-resistant organism, you may need to take antibiotic treatment. At times, extra precautions will be taken to reduce the risk of others being exposed to the multi-resistant organism. These precautions may include moving you from a shared room to a single room at the healthcare facility. The healthcare worker involved in your care may also use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, gowns or apron, masks and eyewear when delivering your care and treatment.

Can HAIs be prevented?

Healthcare facilities use a range of strategies to reduce the risk of infection. Proper hand hygiene is the most important part of preventing the spread of infectious diseases. Healthcare workers will do the following things to prevent and control the spread of infection:

- perform hand hygiene using alcohol-based hand rubs or soap and water
- wear PPE such as gloves, gowns or apron, masks and eyewear
- if necessary, isolate people who have an infective illness
- maintain a clean environment and clean shared equipment.



What can you do to prevent the spread of infection?

Effective hand hygiene is the single most effective action to reduce HAIs. This involves applying an alcohol-based handrub to the surface of hands (including liquids, gels and foams) or washing hands with the use of a water and soap or a soap solution, either non-antimicrobial or antimicrobial. This needs to be completed frequently and thoroughly to reduce risk of spreading bacteria. It is particularly important that you perform hand hygiene after going to the toilet.

Other important things you can do to reduce the risk of infection include:

- Ask the healthcare workers if they have cleaned their hands and if they should be using PPE before caring for you.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze (or into your elbow if you do not have a tissue) and clean your hands afterwards.
- Speak to your healthcare worker if you think you might have an infection or are taking antibiotics.
- Always remember to take your antibiotics and other medications as recommended by your healthcare worker. This includes finishing the prescribed course, even if you are feeling better.
- Ensure the skin around your dressing, wound or medical equipment (e.g. IV line, drips, tubes or drains) is clean and dry. Tell your healthcare worker as soon as possible if the skin around the equipment becomes red, swollen, painful or if the dressing becomes loose or wet. Clean your hands before and after touching a wound, dressing or medical equipment.
- Let your healthcare worker know if your room or equipment is dirty or has not been cleaned properly.
- Stop smoking before admission to a healthcare facility, surgery and while receiving treatment as smoking increases the risk of infections.
- Follow instructions given to you by healthcare workers about caring for your wounds and medical equipment.
- Ask for assistance if you require help with mobilising or hygiene.