

- You are encouraged to ask all members of staff to wash their hands before touching you. They will not mind the question and will thank you for the reminder.

How can visitors help?

- On entering and leaving the wards or departments, please use the alcohol rub to clean your hands.
- Follow any additional infection control measures being used in the area that you are visiting.
- Please do not visit someone in the hospital if you have a current illness. For example, if you have experienced diarrhoea or vomiting then you must refrain from visiting until at least 72 hours after the symptoms have stopped.
- We ask that visitors do not bring or send flowers or plants. This is because they take up valuable space and make ward cleaning more difficult.
- Please do not sit on the beds – sit on a chair.
- Please do not place any bags on the bed.

Please see also the Trust's information leaflet called *Preventing and controlling Healthcare Associated Infections*.

This information can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Please telephone 01737 231958 or email pals@sash.nhs.uk.

Leaflet information:

IPCAS Team, Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
Title: What can patients, carers, relatives and visitors do to reduce HCAI?
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What can you do to help reduce Healthcare Associated Infection?

Information for patients, carers, relatives and visitors



What is Healthcare Associated Infection (HCAI)?

Healthcare Associated Infection is an infection which a patient may get as a result of medical treatment. It can be acquired as a result of treatment in hospital, a GP surgery, a patient's own home or in any other place where treatment is given.

In most cases the infection is caused by the type of bacteria which are normally found on the body. Only a minority of patients get an infection with bacteria from a hospital or clinic.

How common is HCAI?

Large national studies of hospital patients have shown that approximately 9 per cent of patients acquires an infection as a result of their treatment. This figure is similar to hospitals in the USA and Western Europe.

Why do patients get HCAI?

The most important factor is the susceptibility of the patient. For example, those with diabetes or cancer have a lowered immunity as a result of their illness, putting them at greater risk of infection. Elderly patients and the very young are also more susceptible to certain infections.

To treat a patient we often need to use devices such as intravenous drips and urinary catheters. These can act as sites where bacteria can enter the body and cause infection. All types of wound, including surgical wounds, provide a break in the skin's natural defence and bacteria may enter the body – usually bacteria which were already on the patient's skin.

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) are two types of bacteria which can result in Healthcare Associated Infections. There are others, but these two are so significant that the Department of Health has developed national targets concerning their reduction.

There are other infections, for example Norovirus, that can spread easily in an environment such as a hospital.

More information on MRSA, *C. difficile* and Norovirus is available in our series of information leaflets. Please ask a member of staff.

How can patients help?

- Keep your hands and body clean when you are in hospital. Take personal toiletries including soap with you.
- Wash your hands frequently. Everyone should wash their hands after visiting the toilet, before meals and when they are visibly dirty. If you are unable to wash your hands then please ask a nurse who will be happy to help you.
- Wear slippers when walking around the wards – this keeps your feet clean so that bacteria are not transferred from your feet to the bed.
- Please do not sit on other patients' beds – this provides an ideal opportunity for bacteria to spread.
- Help us to keep the hospital clean by keeping your locker top and bed table clear of clutter so that the cleaner or housekeeper can keep them free of dust.
- If you see any dirt or dust around your bed, or if the toilet or bathroom are dirty, please report this to one of the nurses, the ward sister or matron.
- If you have a urinary catheter, a drip or a feeding tube, it is extremely important that you do not touch them.
- It is very easy to transfer germs that live on your hands into wounds. Therefore, it is very important that you do not touch your wound.
- Tell staff immediately if a dressing becomes loose, or if a wound or intravenous drip site becomes painful.