

# Preventing the Spread of Infection



Providing good health care involves both treating and preventing illness. The key to effective infection control is using proper precautions every day. This requires the cooperation of our staff, patients, and visitors.

## The causes of infection

Infections are caused by germs, such as bacteria and viruses. These germs are so small that millions of them can fit on the period at the end of this sentence. They cause common illnesses, such as colds and flu, and serious diseases, such as meningitis, tuberculosis, and HIV.

## How germs are spread

Most germs are spread through contact between people, often by unwashed hands. Some germs are airborne and travel on tiny particles in the air, entering the body as you breathe. Sometimes germs are passed through contaminated food or water.

## You can help to prevent infections!

**Always remember to wash your hands** as it is the number one way to prevent the spread of infection! Wash your hands to wash away germs that have been picked up on your hands from people, pets, and surfaces.

## When should I wash my hands?

- Before you prepare food or eat
- Before and after caring for or visiting an ill person
- After going to the bathroom
- After blowing your nose, sneezing, or coughing
- After playing with or handling a pet
- After changing a diaper

## How do I wash my hands?

There are 3 basic steps:

1. Wet your hands and apply soap.
2. Scrub vigorously for at least 15 seconds.
3. Rinse well and dry with a clean towel.

Waterless, alcohol-based hand sanitizers (60% alcohol) are also an effective way to "de-germ" your hands. Apply enough product to cover your hands and rub briskly until dry.

For some germs, such as *Clostridioides difficile* (also known as *C. diff*), alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not strong enough. You must wash your hands well with soap and water to get rid of these germs.



## How do we prevent the spread of infection in hospitals?

- Hand washing is the most important step for all of us!
- Staff and visitors wear gloves, gowns, and/or masks when in contact with patients at risk for infection, often during procedures or care involving blood or body fluids.

On occasion, patients with certain conditions may be placed in **isolation precautions**. Staff and visitors wear protective gowns, gloves, eyewear, and/or masks to avoid spreading infection to other patients.

## Tips for visitors

### Ask about visitor guidelines.

- These rules help us provide quality patient care, and protect our patients, visitors, and staff.
- Some areas of the hospital, such as intensive care units (ICUs), have special guidelines.
- Please **do not visit if you are sick**. If you are infectious, you could pass your illness to the patient you are visiting, their roommate, another visitor, or a staff member. If needed, we can provide you with a mask to wear while you visit if you have a respiratory infection, such as a cold.

### Follow any needed precautions.

- Live plants and fresh fruits and vegetables may not be allowed in some areas of the hospital to protect the patients from germs that live in plants or dirt.
- If your family member is in isolation, please use protective gowns, gloves, eyewear, and/or masks. Instructions are posted on the door. This protects both you and others with whom you come in contact with when you leave.
- If you have questions about what personal protective equipment (PPE) you should wear, please ask any staff member.

### Discuss bringing children for visits with the nurse.

Special visitation guidelines are used to protect patients and children at the medical center. Adult supervision of children is required at all times.

## For more information

For questions about infection and isolation, speak to a staff member or call Epidemiology at 614-293-8556.

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or healthcare team if you have any questions about your care.**

For more health information, go to [wexnermedical.osu.edu/patiented](http://wexnermedical.osu.edu/patiented) or contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).