

A Checklist for Patients, Families, & Visitors

Visiting a family member or friend in the hospital is a meaningful way to show your support, but it's just as important to protect your loved one and others in the healthcare environment from possible infections.

- Always wash your hands before and after touching a patient.
- Patients have the right to ask healthcare workers to wash their hands before caring for them- it is their right to safe care.
- Patients should wash their hands frequently throughout the day, especially after using the restroom and before eating.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are typically more effective for cleaning hands.
- Staying in a private room can help lower your risk of infection.
- Be sure to cover your cough, clean your hands, and avoid visiting if you're feeling unwell.



For more information, please contact us at Stevenson Memorial Hospital.



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Help Prevent Hospital-Associated Infections

A Guide for Patients & Visitors



What are Hospital-Associated Infections & 'Superbugs'?

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) are infections that patients acquire while receiving treatment in a hospital for a different condition. These infections can occur in any healthcare setting.

- HAIs may result from medical procedures, such as surgery, or the use of devices like urinary catheters, which can compromise the body's natural defences against infection. You can ask your provider about whether its ongoing use is indeed necessary.
- These infections can be caused by various types of bacteria, including those that normally live on your skin, as well as others that are acquired in the hospital, such as "superbugs." Superbugs is a term used for bacteria like:
 - Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)
 - *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*)
- These bacteria earned the nickname "superbugs" because they are highly resistant to antibiotics and can cause serious illness if contracted.
- While these "superbugs" are often associated with hospitals, they can also be acquired outside of healthcare settings.

Healthcare-associated infections are unfortunately common, with about one in ten hospitalized patients developing one. They can also be quite serious, causing approximately 12,000 deaths annually in Canada. However, many healthcare-associated infections are preventable.

Which is better: Alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water?

Alcohol-based hand rubs (sanitizers) are more effective at removing germs, act faster, and cause less skin irritation than soap and water. Use alcohol-based hand rubs unless your hands are visibly dirty, especially after using the restroom. Rub your hands for 15-30 seconds until dry, covering all surfaces and between your fingers. For information on handwashing, visit www.handhygiene.ca.

Other tips:

- Cough into your sleeve or a tissue and clean your hands to prevent spreading germs.
- If you're sick, avoid visiting anyone who is also unwell, whether in a hospital or elsewhere.
- Patients in private rooms have a lower risk of infection than those in shared rooms.
- Cleaning around a hospitalized patient, like wiping bed rails or tables with disinfectant wipes, may reduce infection risk, though hospital cleaning is typically sufficient.



Prevention of Hospital Associated Infections & Superbugs

Superbugs are primarily spread through unwashed hands and contaminated equipment. In hospitals, these bacteria can survive on surfaces like bedside tables and telephones for months, making it easy for infections to spread between patients. The transmission isn't limited to healthcare settings; these superbugs can also spread in other places within the community such as fitness clubs or long-term care facilities.

To reduce the risk of infection, both healthcare workers and visitors must regularly clean their hands, especially before and after patient contact, before performing medical procedures, and after handling body fluids or touching a patient's environment.

Patients, families, and visitors should wash their hands often, particularly after using the restroom and before eating. If healthcare workers do not clean their hands when expected, patients have the right to ask them to do so, and if needed, report them to a supervisor. Practicing good hand hygiene can help protect vulnerable patients, especially those with weakened immune systems, from hospital-associated infections and superbugs.

Have questions about Hospital-Associated Infections?

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your healthcare provider who can direct you to the right person