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.

Good News! 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!

Why? To wash away germs that have been picked up on your hands from people, pets and surfaces.

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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 should I wash my hands?

There are three basic steps:

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

Waterless, alcohol based hand sanitizers (62% 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 Clostridium difficile (C-diff), alcohol sanitizers are not strong enough. You must wash your hands well with soap and water to get rid of these germs.

How we prevent the spread of infection in hospitals?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that hospitals use **Standard Precautions** for all patients.

- Hand washing is the most important step for all of us!
- Staff and visitors wear gloves and gown 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 and gloves 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, 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, fresh fruits or vegetables may not be allowed in some areas of the hospital in order to protect the patients from germs that live in plants or dirt.
  ▶ If your family member is in isolation, please use the protective gowns and gloves. Instructions are posted on the door. This protects both you and others with whom you come in contact when you leave.

• Should you bring children?
  Please discuss bringing children to visit 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 regarding infection and isolation, you can also call Ohio State’s Epidemiology Department at (614) 293-8556. For University Hospital East, call (614) 257-2037.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.