

Preventing Infections

Preventing the spread of infection is critical to your health. It is especially important in a hospital, where many people are in close quarters and where cancer treatments are given that may lower the body's ability to fight infection. **The most important way to prevent the spread of infection is through good hand hygiene, including hand washing and using hand sanitizers.**

Is there a proper way to wash my hands?

Wet your hands and use enough soap for a good lather. Rub your hands together using friction for 15 to 30 seconds, making sure to scrub all surfaces. Then rinse well with water. The amount of time you wash is important. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet to keep your hands clean. By following this procedure, dirt and germs will be removed.

How do I use the hand sanitizer?

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer kills the germs on your hands and is recommended for use when your hands are not visibly dirty. Using a hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol content, apply enough sanitizer to cover your hands. Rub your hands together using friction for 15 to 30 seconds until the product is dry. If your hands dry in less than 15 seconds it means that the amount of sanitizer was not enough. Repeat the process.

When should I do hand hygiene?

- When your hands are dirty
- Before and after contact with another patient, family member or health care worker
- Before eating and drinking
- Before and after handling food
- After handling dirty items
- After blowing your nose, sneezing and going to the restroom

What are other ways to protect myself against infections?

- **Ask** members of your health care team if they have done hand hygiene before seeing you.
- **Do not** touch your nose, eyes or mouth with contaminated (unwashed) fingers.
- **Do not** share personal items, such as dishes, towels, creams, toothbrushes, etc.
- **Avoid** anyone with an infectious illness.

- **Avoid** anyone with an acute respiratory illness (sneezing, coughing, sore throat). If this is not possible, you and they should wear masks until their symptoms disappear.
- **Be alert** - take an active part in your own care or the care of your loved one.

What else can I do to prevent infections?

Avoid the following:

- Peak hours in public areas (theaters, restaurants, indoor playgrounds, etc.)
- Animal facilities (zoos, butterfly museums, pet stores)
- Pet Care (cleaning cat litter boxes, birdcages, dog waste, etc.)

Who is at greater risk of infection?

- Cancer patients who are receiving treatment
- Neutropenic patients (patients with a low white blood cell count)
- Stem cell transplant (SCT) patients
- Leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma patients (hematologic cancers)

If you are at greater risk for infection, there are more ways to prevent infections. Ask your health care provider if the strategies below are recommended for you:

- Wear a mask when outside your hospital room and/or outside your home.
- Wear a mask in crowded public areas.
- Wear a mask in construction areas. (This includes any area where parts of buildings or streets are being repaired, torn down or constructed. Large amounts of dust and debris may be present in the air.)
- Ask your visitors or family members to wear a mask. (In many cases, visitors should always wear a mask while in a patient's room, and should change the mask when it becomes damp.)

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions concerning how to prevent infections, ask your doctor or nurse or call the:

Infection Control and Prevention Department
713-792-3655