



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Hospital Acquired Infections



CYNGOR IECHYD CYMUNED
COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCIL



Hospital acquired infections refer to any infection that occurs during a patient's stay in hospital. They have received a lot of media attention in recent years with increasing numbers of media reports about MRSA, hospital cleanliness and standards of hygiene on our wards. These have contributed to increasing anxiety among patients and the public about the possible risks of staying in hospital.

This leaflet sets out to provide clear and concise information on how best you and your family can help yourselves reduce the chance of picking up an infection during a stay in hospital. It is worth remembering that while 5-10 per cent of patients pick up an infection during their stay in hospital **serious infections are rare.**

Patients as partners

The best thing to do is discuss any issues or concerns you may have before you are admitted. The hospital will have a member of staff available to talk to you, possibly the nurse in charge of your care. You can also ask to talk to your GP or doctor.

It is also important that you consider the following advice:



Hand Hygiene

The chances of developing some infections can be significantly reduced if healthcare staff were to clean their hands **before** and **after** examining every patient. However, for a number of reasons, including time pressures on staff, this does not always happen.

Talk to the ward staff upon your arrival. Mention the advice this leaflet gives and that you will ask them whether they have washed their hands before every examination.

Ask the healthcare staff who come to examine you if they have washed their hands or used the alcohol rub that should be available on every ward. Remember that there is no need to feel embarrassed or awkward about requesting that staff clean their hands.

Hospitals that have taken part in the 'Clean your hands' campaign actively encourage their staff, patients and visitors to do this.

The same advice for hand-hygiene also applies to visitors providing personal care, such as bathing, washing, dressing, helping to feed and toileting for the patient.



Other things to remember



- **Antibiotics** – do tell your doctor or nurse if you've been taking antibiotics prior to your admission to hospital. This will have a bearing on the treatment given to you in the event of an infection developing.
- **Limiting visitors** – Try and ensure you have no more than two or three visitors at any one time. Friends and family who are ill e.g. suffering from coughs and colds, or diarrhoea and/or vomiting should certainly stay away. If they are unsure, you should advise them to 'phone the Ward and ask a nurse for advice'.
- **Limiting visitors** – Please heed the requests of staff for visitors to leave, for example if you need to be examined, have your dressing changed or your ward area needs to be cleaned.
 - It is sensible to take children only if absolutely necessary and important that they are kept under control by an adult visitor. Children moving around the ward increase the risk of infection through cross-contamination – speak to the person in charge regarding the appropriateness of children visiting the ward.

- **Food storage** – it is important to be aware of your local NHS Trust’s food storage policy. Many do not have the capacity to keep food fresh for more than 24 hours so please bear this in mind if you wish to bring in, or have visitors bring in, food to the hospital. If the hospital policy states it, then staff must be informed when food is brought in for you. Please ask a nurse on the ward for advice.
- **Infected Laundry** – if you have an infection before going into hospital or develop one, then staff should place your clothing in a sealed bag and give you instructions on how to clean it. You should arrange for this to be taken home the same day or as soon as possible to wash. If you do not have anyone to do this for you, then talk to a member of staff. The hospital may be able to make alternative arrangements.

If you are in isolation

- You may be advised of your need to be treated in isolation or through the use of standard precautions. If this is the case, the rules that need to be followed during a visit will be stricter.
- Patients may be isolated or barrier-nursed either to help prevent the spread of infection to others or to help prevent vulnerable patients acquiring an infection e.g. when taking some form of chemotherapy. In some cases they may be placed in single rooms or cubicles. It is always best to ask the hospital staff caring for the patient about the procedures to follow while visiting. These should include some or all of the following:
 - Hand hygiene – see page 3;
 - Limiting visitors – see page 4;
 - Keeping doors closed;
 - Wearing protective clothing e.g. aprons and gloves.

Once again, it is important to emphasise the need to talk through these procedures with a nurse or doctor at the hospital.

Please follow the advice contained within this leaflet. By doing so you can be reassured that you are doing all you can to help prevent yourself pick up an infection during your stay in hospital. Please also remember that serious infections are rare and most are easily treatable. Again, if you have any concerns, then please talk to a healthcare professional. They will be able to answer your queries.

Further information

The Welsh Assembly Government has produced an information leaflet on MRSA. To obtain a copy of this leaflet, please call the Public Health Protection Division on 029 2082 6312 or you can download it from

www.wales.nhs.uk/whaip

Websites to visit

There is a considerable amount of information available via the internet. Some of the better sites relating to infections are:

- The National Public Health Service:

www.nphs.wales.nhs.uk

- Health Protection Agency

www.hpa.org.uk

- Association of Medical microbiologists

www.amm.co.uk

- The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) also has a website for patients with helpful information about going into hospital.

www.npsa.nhs.uk

- For infection rates in Wales and information on the Welsh Healthcare Associated Infection Programme, please visit

www.wales.nhs.uk/whaip

Further copies of this leaflet are available from:

Public Health Protection Division on 029 2082 6312 or you can download it from

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/health/ocmo/?lang=en>