

## What are healthcare associated infections (HCAIs)?

Healthcare associated infections are infections that someone has developed, as a direct result of receiving healthcare. Occasionally, carers or others providing healthcare may develop HCAIs.

## What types of HCAIs are most common?

The most commonly reported HCAIs are: urinary tract infections, wound infections (following surgery), skin infections and infections that cause vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

## Why do patients develop HCAIs?

There are many reasons why patients develop HCAIs.

- Your body may not be able to fight infection as a result of your illness or because of the treatment you are receiving.
- Generally the more medical care a person requires, the more likely they are to develop an infection.

- Patients who do not have any serious underlying illness are at low risk of developing an HCAI if they are admitted to hospital for a short period of time.

## What happens when a patient develops an HCAI?

- If you develop an HCAI in hospital or a care home, you may need to be looked after in a single room to prevent the spread of infection to others.
- Healthcare staff may need to wear disposable gloves, aprons and/or masks when caring for you.
- If you develop an HCAI you may need extra medication, depending on the type of infection you have developed.
- You should be provided with advice about how you can prevent the infection from spreading to anyone else.

## Top tips for patients and visitors to prevent HCAIs

- Do not visit anyone in a healthcare facility if you are feeling unwell or if you think that you may have an infection. If you have had an infection, you should not visit until you are at least 48 hours symptom free.

- Observe visiting times and restrictions that have been put in place by the ward/care home manager.
- Ask your visitors not to sit on your bed. Do not encourage small children to visit you and, if they do, make sure that they are supervised at all times.
- Discourage visitors from visiting more than one patient/resident in hospital/care home.
- Ensure that unnecessary items or belongings are taken home and that your bed area is tidy so that it can be easily cleaned.
- Discuss any concerns that you may have with the ward/care home manager.
- Do not unnecessarily handle your drips/catheters/wound dressings etc. Ask your visitors to do the same.
- Ask your visitors to wash their hands before and after contact with you and your surroundings. Patients should remember to wash their own hands regularly too.

Hand sanitisers may not be suitable to use, depending on the infection you have. Staff will provide you with advice on what you should use.

## The importance of hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is an important way of preventing and controlling the spread of HCAs.

## How to clean your hands

### Soap

- Wet your hands before applying liquid soap.
- Rub the soap vigorously into all areas of the hands to produce a lather.
- Then rinse hands under running water and dry thoroughly.

### Hand sanitisers

- You can use a hand sanitiser instead of soap and water if the hands are visibly clean.
- Do **not** use sanitisers if someone is vomiting and/or has diarrhoea (norovirus), or when someone has *clostridium difficile* infection (infectious diarrhoea). If this is the case, a member of staff will let you know.
- You don't have to wet your hands first.
- You should rub your hands together, covering all areas of your hands, until the sanitiser is absorbed or dries.

If you require further advice or information, please contact the hospital's Infection Prevention and Control Team or a member of the ward/care home staff.

**Infection prevention and control is everyone's responsibility.**

**Patients and visitors all have an important role to play in preventing the spread of healthcare associated infections.**

# Healthcare associated infections

**Information leaflet for patients and visitors**