Infection prevention & healthcare facilities

ACIPC
Australasian College
for Infection Prevention and Control

Several different kinds of bacteria, and less often, viruses and other germs, are responsible for hospital infections, or healthcare acquired infections (HAI).

When you go to the hospital, healthcare workers (HCW) may need to use a variety of tools to help save your life or improve your health. Regrettably these same things that they use can hold bacteria and other germs that can cause you an infection. Various items such as urinary catheters, surgical implements, breathing tubes, and even gloves can spread infection if not properly cared for or used.

Why are infections transmitted in healthcare facilities?

1. Hospitals are full of sick people who bring with them a variety of infections.
2. Hospital patients do not always have strong immune systems. Their bodies are hard at work trying to recover from an illness, injury, or surgery. And when the immune system is not in top condition, your body's defenses are down and it's easy for a new germ to invade.
3. Staff in healthcare facilities are often busy and forget to do the simple things such as wash their hands or wipe over bits of equipment they have used.

You can take many steps to steer clear of infections. Being aware of your rights as a patient/consumer and following a few practical tips will go a long way toward ensuring you don't leave a healthcare facility sicker than when you arrived.

10 top tips in infection prevention

1 Wash up.
Do your duty by washing your hands or at least using a hand alcohol gel that doesn't require water every time you use the bathroom. Don't handle anything that might be a germ carrier such as used tissues or cloth hankies.

Read more at Hand Hygiene Australia

2 Ask away.
Don't be afraid to ask your healthcare worker e.g. nurse or doctor if they have washed their hands.

Read more in the Speak Up brochure
Read more at Patient Opinion

3 Watch that wound.
Be sure to keep the dressing around a wound dry and clean. Let a nurse know immediately if it gets wet or begins to fall off.

4 Care for that catheter.
Treat your catheter site as a wound dressing and keep it clean and dry. If the dressing comes loose or if the drainage tube becomes dislodged, tell your nurse.

5 Be part of the team.
Be sure everyone involved in your care knows of any potential medical conditions, such as diabetes, that may affect your healing.

6 Know and follow the rules.
Follow what your doctor, nurse or infection control practitioner has told you and ask questions if you are unsure about anything he or she has told you to do or not do.

Read more in the Speak Up brochure

7 Be sure well-wishers are well.
Tell family or friends who are sick to send you a get-well card instead of dropping by for a visit.

8 Food safety.
Make sure that if anyone brings cooked food into hospital for you it comes in sealed containers that have been carried in an esky/cold bag and placed straight into the fridge. This could prevent you from getting food poisoning.

Read more at the Food Safety Information Council

9 Cough etiquette.
Remember to cough into your shoulder and put used tissues straight into the bin. Remember to wash your hands straight after.

Read more at Cough and Respiratory Etiquette

10 Immunisations.
This is one of the most important things you can do to prevent spreading infections such as seasonal influenza. Remember flu can kill!

Read more at the Australian Government Department of Health- Immunise Australia Program
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