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Reducing the  
risk of healthcare  
associated  
infection



Patient Information





## Introduction

The Royal Marsden takes the safety of our patients very seriously. That means doing everything we can to reduce the risk of anyone acquiring an infection while they are in our care. Infection prevention is regarded as everyone's business, and the Trust's board is committed to supporting staff in preventing infections.

This leaflet offers general information about infections, what patients, their relatives and visitors can do to help prevent them and details of who to talk to if you want more information. Separate leaflets about MRSA and Clostridium difficile (C diff) are also available.

## What is healthcare associated infection (HCAI)?

An infection occurs when a germ (bacterium or virus) enters the body and attacks or causes damage to the whole body or part of it. Some infections can reach the blood stream and become generalised throughout the body. This is known as a bacteraemia or bloodstream infection.

Healthcare associated infections (HCAI) are infections that develop as a direct result of medical or surgical treatment or contact in a healthcare setting. They can occur in hospitals, health or social care settings in the community and can affect both patients and healthcare workers.



Common HCAs include:

- *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff)
- methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)
- *Escherichia coli* (E. coli).

Reducing the risk of HCAI and patient safety is a top priority for The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust.

## How do patients develop an infection?

The surface of the body is densely populated by a wide variety of micro organisms which use it as their home. This is called colonisation. A small proportion of these micro organisms have the ability to cause infection, such as *E.coli* from the gut causing urinary infections or *Staphylococcus aureus* causing skin infection such as abscesses. Micro organisms may also cause infection by transmission from unclean environments or poor hand hygiene practice.

Many conditions and treatments can increase the risk of infection including:

- a weakened immunity or immunosuppression
- the use of invasive devices such as intravenous and urinary catheters
- any wound, including surgical wounds, since they breach the body's natural defences, in this case the skin
- older adults and very young patients

may be more susceptible to infection

- the use of broad spectrum antibiotics may increase the risk of *Clostridium difficile* infections

### How do the hospital staff prevent the spread of HCAI?

The Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPCT) work closely with the clinical teams ensuring high quality standards are maintained. The IPCT monitor infection within The Trust. All patients visiting the hospital for the first time will have a nose swab to screen for meticillin resistant staphylococcus aureus. This swab will be taken at a pre-assessment for your treatment or on admission. Specimens such as blood cultures, urine specimens or wound swabs may be taken as part of your treatment to reduce the risk of infection or to provide information to help with treatment.

The Trust has clear standards in infection prevention which include:

- strict hand hygiene before and after contact with each patient or their environment
- adequate hand hygiene facilities for staff and patients
- a clean hospital environment and good hygiene practice
- isolation of patients in single rooms, when necessary, to reduce the risk of infection

- careful prescription of antimicrobial drugs
- training on infection prevention and control for all staff


## What can patients and their visitors do to help?

It is important you inform your nurse if you have had any previous infections or any signs of possible infection, such as a wound that is hot, red or showing signs of pus, or if you have symptoms such as diarrhoea or vomiting. We may need to take further specimens.

- Always wash your hands with soap and warm water after going to the toilet. Hand rub is not recommended as it does not remove dirt from the hands or kill *Clostridium difficile* spores that may be present in diarrhoea.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water or use the cleansing hand wipe provided on your meal tray before eating and drinking.
- Use your own toiletries and never share these with others.
- Wear slippers. This will ensure that bacteria from the floor do not transfer to your bedding.
- Do not sit on other patients' beds.
- Bath or shower daily and wash your hair regularly.
- Keep bed areas clutter free to assist

the cleaners and nurses in keeping your bed space clean and free of dust.

- Please inform the matron or your nurse if you are concerned about any aspect of hygiene or cleanliness.
- Inform your nurse if your dressing becomes loose, falls off or becomes wet or blood-stained.
- If your intravenous line, drain or catheter becomes sore or dislodged, please alert your nurse or doctor.
- It is acceptable to ask staff caring for you whether they have cleaned their hands. It is Trust policy that all staff caring for you are “bare below the elbows”. You may also ask them to roll up their sleeves and remove watches and jewellery to ensure hand hygiene is carried out effectively.
- Visitors must check with the nursing staff before entering a single room and always follow advice about what precautions to take.
- Visitors are asked not to visit if they are suffering from a cold, flu, diarrhoea, stomach upset, rash or if you have had recently had an infectious disease, for example, chicken pox or measles.
- Closely supervise any children and do not allow them to touch any equipment.
- Do not bring in cooked food. This is because bacteria multiply as the food cools, and is especially important



for patients that are undergoing transplantation procedures as they need special diets. Certain foods can increase the risk of infection.

## Who can I talk to about HCAI?

If you would like more information, or if you have any questions or concerns about HCAI please talk to your doctor or nurse or ask to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on 020 8661 3248.

## References

If you have any questions about the references used in writing this booklet, please call:

**The Royal Marsden Help Centre on**

**Freephone:** 0800 783 7176 or

**Email:** [patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk](mailto:patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk)

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