Infection Prevention information for patients in General Practice

What are the most common types of HCAI in hospital?

The most common types of HCAI in hospitals are urine infections, wound infections, skin infections, chest infections & sickness and diarrhoea.

What type of germs cause HCAI?

Some are caused by germs that live normally on our bodies and usually do us no harm such as Staphylococcus aureus, which many people can carry harmlessly in their nose. The most well known are ‘MRSA’, ‘C-diff’ and ‘Norovirus’

MRSA is short for Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus. This bacteria can cause an infection if it gets into a wound, the bloodstream, bladder or lungs.

C-diff is short for Clostridium difficile a bacteria that some people have living naturally in their bowel. For some people unfortunately, this can develop into diarrhoea and fever (usually after certain kinds of antibiotics).

Norovirus causes sickness and diarrhoea. This may last for a couple of days and usually has no lasting effects. This virus is often reported as causing outbreaks of infection in hospitals and care homes.

There are also information leaflets available on:

- MRSA (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus),
- C-diff (Clostridium Difficile),
- Norovirus
- ESBL (Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase)

Together we can fight infection

Any infection can be caught or spread were there are ill people together, this can be in a hospital, a care home a GP surgery or in a public place. This leaflet explains how you can help the staff to reduce infection and provide a clean and safe environment in which you receive treatment and/ or care. By following the points in this leaflet, you can help us to prevent vulnerable individuals picking up an infection and prevent the spread of infections. If people pick up an infection, it can cause discomfort, pain and anxiety.
How does infection spread?

You need a germ
- The germ lives in or on its host, an other person, an animal, or a contaminated surface (door handle, worktop, equipment)
- The germ is passed on by either direct or indirect contact, this can be coughing, sneezing, hand contact with someone who carries the germ on their hand, or by touching a contaminated surface
- If the germ then enters your system and you are not immune to it you can catch the infection

Generally healthy people are less likely to catch infections, as their immune system should protect them well. But if for any reason your immune system is weaker than normal, you will be more vulnerable and therefore need to protect yourself even more against any infection.

What you can do:

Hand Hygiene
- Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet
- Wash your hands before eating / taking medication
- Where supplied use alcohol hand gel to clean your hands (hospitals, GP surgeries, care homes, other care settings)
- Avoid touching your wounds or any indwelling devices you may have. Always clean your hands before and after if you do, for any reason, have to touch them
- If you are examined or have to have a procedure, do not be afraid to ask the staff if they have washed their hands or used alcohol hand gel first.

Personal Hygiene
- Please shower or bath, wear clean clothes and check your footwear is not muddy before going to your GP surgery or any other clinical setting
- The area where you are receiving treatment / care should be clean. However if you are concerned about the cleaning standards, please report it immediately
- Children should be discouraged from crawling on the floor and must be supervised at all times
- If you receive any treatment or care at home, please provide hand washing facilities where possible, for the person attending to you.

What do we do to prevent HCAI spreading?

Preventing and controlling HCAI is a national priority and all care settings are working hard to prevent the spread of infection in the NHS and care homes. This includes:
- educating staff, patient and visitors on how to prevent and control infections, for example, washing hands regularly; getting support and advice from specialist infection control or health protection staff;
- making sure that the NHS and care homes meet government standards on HCAI;
- giving people information on how to prevent and control HCAI within all care settings and among members of the public;

All HCAI are monitored and reported to the local health authority, for learning and improvement purposes.

What happens if I get an infection?

Your infection could require treatment, which probably can be given to you at home. You may be asked to stay at home for the duration of the treatment and not visit the GP surgery, they will arrange a home visit instead. If you don’t understand your condition and/or treatment please ask a member of staff.

What is a Health Care Associated Infection (HCAI)?

This is an infection that may affect people when they are receiving healthcare. People may catch these infections in hospitals, care homes, doctors’ surgeries, health centres and even at home if they are being cared for there.

Why do some people get an HCAI when receiving healthcare?

There are lots of reasons why someone can develop an HCAI. Being ill or receiving treatment can make your natural defence system (immune system) weaker than usual.

Most people won’t pick up an HCAI while they are being treated but it is impossible to completely remove all the risk during healthcare. This is because every disease, condition or procedure and sometimes medication can reduce your natural defences against infection.