

Infection Prevention *and* You

HOME CARE

Learn how others are working to help keep you safe from infection and how you can participate in your care.

Who are “infection preventionists?”

Every healthcare provider is an infection preventionist working to protect you from healthcare-associated infections. In fact, some home care agencies will have a dedicated individual assigned to oversee and coordinate all infection prevention activities.

An infection preventionist’s number one priority is your safety. They strive to keep you, your family, and others safe from infection.

What are healthcare-associated infections?

A healthcare-associated infection is one that can occur as a result of the care or treatment that a patient receives. The most common types of healthcare-associated infections are pneumonia, urinary tract, gastrointestinal, bloodstream, skin and soft tissue, and surgical site infections.

How does an infection preventionist affect the care I receive?

Infection preventionists partner with members of your healthcare team and use proven methods to help you stay safe from healthcare-associated infections.

You may notice infection prevention activities when the home care staff visits, such as:

- Alcohol-based hand rubs
- Hand washing
- Disinfectant wipes to clean equipment
- Home health providers wearing gloves, masks and/or gowns, as appropriate for the type of care they are providing
- Discussions with you about how to prevent infections

What do I need to know to stay safe?

Your home health providers are concerned about your health and safety. They want you to have a voice in your care. You and your family are important members of the healthcare team.

Please speak up! Do not feel shy about asking for more information about your care. Infection prevention is everyone’s business!

If you have a concern, feel free to ask the following or any other questions:

- If you have not seen your home care providers either use the alcohol-based hand rub or wash their hands, ask them to do so. This also applies to visitors.
“I didn’t see you clean your hands. Would you mind cleaning your hands before touching me?”
- Before receiving an injection or IV, ask if the needle, vial, and syringe have been newly opened for you.
“Is this the first time this needle, vial, and syringe have been used?”
- If you have a catheter in your bladder or vein, tell your home care provider if it leaks or becomes painful. If you have an IV in your vein, tell your home care provider if it becomes loose or painful. Also, ask when it can be removed.
 - **“If the bandage over my IV becomes loose or soiled before your next visit, what should I do?”**
 - **“Do I still need this catheter? Why?”**
- If you have a bandage (also called a “dressing”), ask what to do if it gets wet, loose, or feels uncomfortable.
“If the dressing over my incision becomes loose or soiled before your next visit, what should I do?”
- Ask if you need any vaccines.
“Should I be receiving vaccines to protect me from infection?”
- Ask if there are any special cleaning instructions you should follow.
 - **“How can I protect my family and pets from infection?”**
 - **“Should I use a special disinfectant for cleaning?”**

If you’re visiting:

- Do NOT touch the patient’s dressings, medical equipment, or supplies.
- Do NOT sit on the patient’s bed. Pull up a chair instead.
- If you will be responsible for any part of the patient’s care – such as changing a dressing or giving a medication – be sure you understand what you should do and how to do it. “Could you show me again how to change the dressing? I’m not sure I understand each step.”
- Visit often and be an advocate for the patient. Ask questions about his/her care, as appropriate.
- Do NOT visit if you’re feeling ill.

Important reminders:

- Use alcohol-based hand rub or wash your hands often and ask your caregivers and visitors to do the same. This is one of the most important ways to prevent infection.
- Take antibiotics exactly as directed, if prescribed.
- Call your provider with any concerns or questions.

Infection prevention contact:

How can I learn more about infection prevention?

Visit the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC)’s website www.apic.org/patientsafety to learn more about how you can protect yourself and loved ones from infection.

