

# Infection Prevention and You



## Who are infection preventionists?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 25 hospitalized patients will get an infection as a result of the care they receive, and an estimated 75,000 patients will die each year. Because healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) are a threat to patient safety, many hospitals and healthcare facilities have made the prevention and reduction of these infections a top priority.

Infection preventionists (IPs) are professionals who make sure healthcare workers and patients are doing all the things they should to prevent infections. Most IPs are nurses, epidemiologists, public health professionals, microbiologists, doctors, or other health professionals who work to prevent germs from spreading within healthcare facilities. They look for patterns of infection within the facility; observe practices; educate healthcare teams; advise hospital leaders and other professionals; compile infection data; develop policies and procedures; and coordinate with local and national public health agencies.

## Patient safety is the number one priority for IP. They ensure that:

- Healthcare workers wash their hands;
- Healthcare workers get the proper vaccinations;
- Doctors and pharmacists are providing you with the appropriate antibiotics;
- Catheters or indwelling devices are placed in your body after your skin receives proper cleaning and are kept clean and removed as soon as possible;
- Safe injection practices are followed at all times;
- Healthcare workers wear gloves, gowns, and masks at the right times; and
- Your room and any equipment that is used on you will be clean.

Each of us—patients, families, and healthcare personnel—has an important role to play in preventing infection. Learning about IPs and the infection prevention basics will help patients and their families stay healthy while receiving healthcare.

## Here are the top 10 ways patients and families can prevent infection:

- 1) **Speak up for your care.** Always talk with your healthcare providers, ask questions, and discuss your concerns. Whenever a treatment is recommended, ask why it is necessary and what risks are associated with it. Write questions down before your appointment, so you don't forget anything!
- 2) **Clean your hands often.** Hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of infection. Make sure that everyone around you, including your healthcare providers and visitors, clean their hands. If you don't see that person washing their hands or using an alcohol based hand-rub, don't feel bad about

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asking them to do so. Healthcare workers have been educated about hand hygiene and also expect that patients will—and should—ask them about hand washing. It is important that you are also diligent about washing your own hands when you are caring for yourself or a family member.

- 3) **Ask about safe injection practices.** Safe injection practices are steps that your healthcare providers should follow when they give injections. For example, not using the same needle or syringe on more than one patient. Remember: One needle, one syringe, only one time.
- 4) **Ask to have your room or equipment cleaned.** Keeping healthcare facilities clean is extremely important. It's very easy for germs to be passed from the surfaces to the hands and to other people. So ask to have your room or equipment cleaned if they appear dirty or dusty.
- 5) **Ask questions about your medications.** Using antibiotics the wrong way can cause bacteria to grow into superbugs. Know what your medication is for, how to take it, how long you should take it, and how often you should take it. If you are taking antibiotics, take them exactly as prescribed, even if you start to feel better.
- 6) **Ask if you should shower before having surgery.** If you are having surgery, ask if you should shower with a germ-killing soap ahead of time.
- 7) **Ask each day if you still need a catheter.** Doctors are responsible for ordering the removal of catheters, so ask if you still need it.
- 8) **Ask about vaccinations so you stay healthy.** Vaccines are a very effective way to prevent the suffering (and costs) associated with vaccine-preventable infections.
- 9) **Recognize an infection preventionist.** IPs partner with your healthcare team to make sure everyone is doing the right things to keep you safe from healthcare-associated infections.
- 10) **Learn about healthcare-associated infections.** HAIs are infections that patients can get while receiving treatment for medical or surgical conditions.

If you have a question about infection prevention, ask to speak with the IP at your healthcare facility.

## Additional resources

- APIC—Infection Prevention and You <http://professionals.site.apic.org/>
- APIC—Recognize an Infection Preventionist <http://professionals.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-basics/recognize-an-infection-preventionist/>
- APIC—Infection Prevention Basics <http://professionals.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-basics/>
- APIC—About APIC <https://apic.org/About-APIC/About-APIC-Overview>
- AHRQ— Getting Ready for Your Ambulatory Surgery <https://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/hais/tools/ambulatory-surgery/sections/implementation/training-tools/getting-ready.html>
- SHEA—Help Prevent Infections [http://professionals.site.apic.org/files/2018/02/SHEA-Brochure\\_on\\_healthcare\\_associated\\_infections\\_English.pdf](http://professionals.site.apic.org/files/2018/02/SHEA-Brochure_on_healthcare_associated_infections_English.pdf)

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