Infection Prevention in Behavioral Health

Behavioral health programs provide very important forms of healthcare. While behavioral health programs focus on mental health and wellbeing, certain characteristics of these settings may make it easier for germs to be transmitted that might make you sick.

Understanding the importance of personal hygiene or cleanliness, early identification of colds or other illnesses, and staying the appropriate distance from others during group therapy are ways to decrease infection risk to healthcare providers and patients in behavioral health.

Personal hygiene is everybody's business

Personal cleanliness, especially hand hygiene, is very important in keeping not only you safe from getting sick, but those around you as well. When you touch a surface, such as a table, doorknob, or another person’s hands, germs on those surfaces get transferred to your hands. Even if the surface looks clean, germs are present. If you don’t kill or wash these germs off your hands, they can get into your body when you eat, touch your eyes, mouth, or nose. You can also unknowingly move germs around so others can get sick as well.
Speak up

If you are going to a behavioral health facility or partial-day program, let the admitting staff know if you have a cold, flu-like symptoms, rashes, or any other medical concerns, as soon as possible. This is very important so that you can receive proper treatment if appropriate, and measures can be taken to prevent others from getting sick. Early identification of possible contagious situations can go a long way in protecting other patients and employees. One of the best things you can do is to be current with vaccinations, such as the yearly influenza vaccination, measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), and tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis (Tdap). These vaccinations are important as they minimize illness caused by these germs or prevent them altogether.

Staying healthy

An important part of behavioral health programs is involvement in group sessions. If you are coughing, cover your cough with your elbow, as this is better than coughing into your hands. If you cough into your hands or tissue, remember to use hand sanitizer or wash with soap and water as soon as possible. Staying 3 to 6 feet or 2 arms-length away from other individuals will also help to prevent the transmission of germs. Be sure to wash your hands frequently.

In summary, key points to remember to help prevent getting sick when going to a behavioral health facility or partial-day program:

• Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer frequently – especially before touching your face or eating, even if your hands look clean.
• Let the staff know if you are sick or have any rashes.
• Stay current on your immunizations – this is one of the best ways to prevent getting sick from many germs.
• Always cough into your elbow. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after coughing or sneezing in them (even if you used a tissue).
• Keep at least 3 to 6 feet or 2 arms-length away from others who may be sick.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/preventing.htm

https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/

http://professionals.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-basics/clean-your-hands-often/