

Hygiene and Infection



Control advice in the home

Introduction

The Infection Control Department Mid-Western Regional Hospital, Ennis, wrote this booklet with Clare Primary Community and Continuing Care and C-Diff Patients and Families Group. This booklet is for patients who have been discharged from hospital with an infection. It also provides advice on general hygiene and infection-control in the home.

Germ

Germ get into our homes all the time – on people, food and pets and sometimes through our water supply. It is difficult to know whether there are enough germ to create or cause an infection as it depends on each individual, how contagious the germ is and if the conditions mean it can spread easily.

For example, there are a lot of germ in a toilet bowl but the risk of the germ spreading is low. However, cleaning cloths, towels and mops will come into contact with the germ and help infection spread.

Cleaning is very important as germ do not have anywhere to live once dirt has been removed. You should clean regularly (particularly in high-risk areas), instead of once a week. You should clean areas like the kitchen and bathroom ‘as you go’. You don’t need to clean floors as often as you clean high-risk areas.



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Hygiene and risk of infection

If you are healthy you are not at an increased risk of getting an infection. Depending on your age, you may be slightly at risk.

For example, children under five, pregnant women and adults over 65 are more at risk. You are also at increased risk of getting an infection if you have recently been discharged from hospital or you are undergoing medical treatment or taking antibiotics.

If a member of the family has an infection, they may risk spreading it to a person who is 'at risk'. This may happen if a person is discharged from hospital with an infection. They may have a wound infection or bowel infection, and may no longer have symptoms of the illness but could spread infection to a vulnerable family member through the environment or by hand. You need to remember that more and more infections start in this way.

For example, the winter vomiting bug, C-Diff, MRSA and so on.

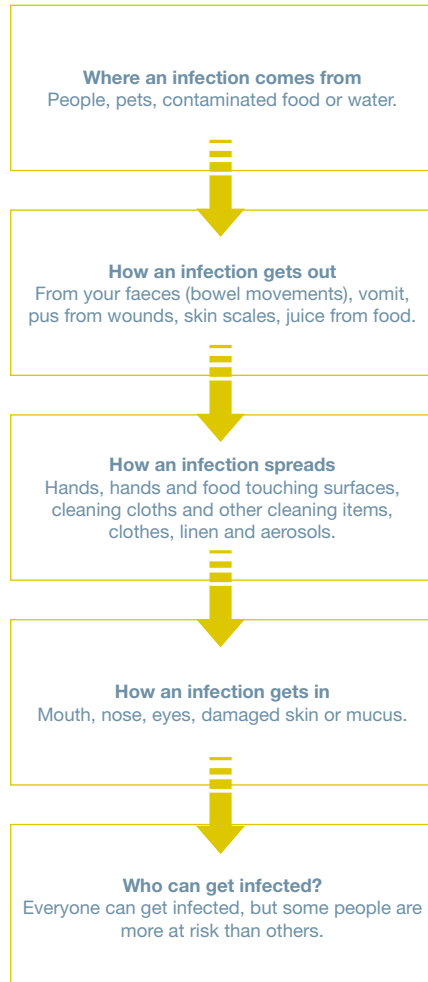
If you are discharged from hospital with an infection, your family may be worried because of the strict precautions that applied while you were in the hospital. You need to tell your family that these measures were to prevent the spread of infection to other vulnerable patients in the hospital who were at risk because of their illness or surgery. Hospitals have many sick people close to each other. At home, the risks are reduced, but you need to continue to be hygienic to prevent the spread of infection to other family members. You may be cleared of infection, only to get reinfected by contaminated surfaces in your home.



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- If you are a carer, you should keep your patient's home clean. The most important surfaces are surfaces that come into contact with hands (for example, door handles, telephones, bedside tables and bed frames). You should clean them with hot water and detergent.
- In a busy house, you can't always keep surfaces that are in contact with hands clean. This is why you need to wash your hands as often as you can to stop germs spreading around the home.





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Preventing infection in the home

Keeping your hands clean is the best way of preventing infection spreading in the home or the hospital. Your hands can pass an infection on and can pick up germs from one place and transfer them to another. We know that a toilet is full of germs but the germs can only move from the bathroom to the kitchen counter on our hands.

Washing your hands with warm water and soap (preferably liquid soap) and drying them properly (with a paper towel) will remove germs and prevent them from moving anywhere else. Alcohol hand-rubs are useful in the home but they will not kill some germs, especially germs that cause diarrhoea. Washing your hands properly at the bathroom sink is always the best way to get rid of germs. (You need to remember that the bathroom hand towel can spread germs.)

You need to wash your hands

When to wash your hands:

- If your hands are dirty
- If you have been in contact with blood or body fluids (faeces, vomit, spit, nappies, pads, pus and urine)
- If you use the toilet
- Before and after you touch a sick person
- Before you eat
- Before you prepare food
- After you have touched raw meat
- After you have cleaned your house
- After you feed or touch pets
- After any farming or gardening
- After you handle waste or rubbish
- After you wash soiled clothes
- After you cough or sneeze

Important: You should always cover cuts with waterproof plasters. You should also use hand cream to prevent cracks and breaks in the skin. This will help stop germs getting into the skin.



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How to wash your hands



Palm to palm



Put your right palm over the back of your left hand and then your left palm over the back of your right hand.



Put your fingers between the fingers on the opposite hand, palms together and fingers facing down.



Put the back of the fingers of one hand into the palm of the other and interlock your fingers.



Rub your thumbs in a circle in both palms



Rub the palms of one hand with the fingers of the other, and then swap over.

Cleaning equipment

Hands spread infection. Cloths, mops, towels and sponges spread infection but also spread germs around – because they are damp they are ideal breeding grounds for germs. You need to keep these items clean and dry. The best way to make sure that you don't spread germs by cloth, mops, towels and sponges is to use disposable ones or good-quality kitchen roll. If you or someone else has infectious diarrhoea or vomiting, you should use disposable cloths, mops, towels and sponges. If you can't do this, you need to change your cloths, mops, towels and sponges frequently and wash them at 60°C, preferably in a washing machine. Microfibre cloths and mop heads are particularly good for cleaning and last a long time.

See the section on washing and laundry.



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Surfaces floors and equipment

We know that floors can be dirty but as we only walk on them and never use our feet to prepare food, clean or change wound dressings, the risk of getting infection and spreading it from the floor is low.

- Clean floors, carpets and other surfaces every day using a vacuum cleaner.
- Do not use a vacuum if someone in your home has a stomach bug and is suffering from diarrhoea or vomiting.
- Make sure your vacuum cleaner is working properly. Keep the filters clean and change them regularly.

You touch everything in your home, so you need to keep all surfaces clean to stop germs spreading from your hands. You should use detergent and hot water to clean all surfaces. If someone in your home has diarrhoea or vomiting, you should also use a good-quality household bleach. The bleach will not work if the area is dirty. You should always clean the dirtiest areas in your home last.

You should clean the kitchen before the bathroom and you should clean the sink and shower first and the toilet last. You should also have separate cleaning cloths for the kitchen and bathroom, and for the toilet and the bath/sink.

The most important areas you need to clean are the things you touch, like keyboards, phones, remote controls, toys, toilet flushes, light switches, taps and door handles.



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Kitchens

The kitchen is a high-risk area for spreading infection.

To prevent infection you should do the following:

- Wash your hands before you touch food.
 - Clean the dirtiest areas last.
 - Keep your fridge temperature between 2 and 4°C.
 - Make sure the seal on your fridge door works and the door closes properly.
 - Put raw meat at the bottom of your fridge, away from other foods, and always check best-before dates.
 - Make sure your dishwasher is working properly.
 - Use separate equipment for raw food.
 - Do not let wet or damp cloths hang in your kitchen.
 - Keep disposable paper towels or microfibre cloths you can put in the washing machine.
 - Try not to keep any dirty tea towels in your kitchen. If you have a dishwasher, let it complete its full cycle at 65°C or above.
- Clean up as you do any work.
 - Use a non-tainting food sanitizer.
 - Clean your kitchen before your bathroom and toilet and use separate cloths



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Bathrooms

The bathroom is a high-risk area for infection. There are a lot of things in the bathroom that carry germs and if you touch these things the germs can get onto your hands and move to another area, such as the kitchen, or onto another person.

To prevent infection you should:

- Always wash your hands after using the toilet or bathroom
- Make sure you keep your bathroom clean
- Use hot water and detergent for cleaning your bathroom
- Use separate cloths for cleaning the bathroom
- Clean your sink first and your toilet last
- Clean the areas that you touch regularly, such as your toilet, flush and taps;
- Clean your toilet bowl regularly with a limescale remover. You shouldn't use bleach as it can stop good bacteria breaking down solids if you have a septic tank or bio-unit;

Cleaning up body fluids

- Clean floors or other surfaces that have come into contact with faeces or vomit;
- Get rid of as much of the faeces from the surface as you can using paper or a disposable cloth;
- Clean surfaces with hot water and detergent using a fresh cloth or paper towel to get rid of dirt, then put household bleach onto the surface using a fresh cloth or paper towel to kill any germs;
- Wear disposable gloves if you come into contact with faeces or body fluids and wash your hands after you've taken your gloves off; and
- Never put bleach directly onto urine or vomit spills. You should clean them with hot water and detergent and then use a small amount of household bleach once you have cleaned the area.



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Washing / laundry

If you have an infection in your home, you should have your own personal hygiene items such as a facecloth and towel. You should never share razors or toothbrushes, and you should wash hands with liquid soap if you touch soiled clothing.

You should keep the infected person's clothes, sheets, pillows and linens away from the rest of the laundry and you should wash them separately. You should wash them at 40°C using a bleach-based laundry product or at 60°C or above with any other type of laundry product. You should remember that washing at 40°C without bleach will not kill all germs.

You should also do the following:

- Wash towels, mops and cleaning equipment at 60° or above and preferably in a washing machine.
- Tumble-dry clothes where possible, at as high a temperature as possible.
- Hot steam-ironing helps to reduce any germs left over from washing.
- Don't wash soiled clothes by hand. If you can't avoid this, you should wear rubber or disposable gloves. When you wash clothes in a bath, slowly lower the clothes into the bath to prevent spraying and to prevent germs spreading. You should never wash soiled clothes in the kitchen.
- Always wash your hands after handling soiled clothes or items.



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Wounds / bed sores / tubes

If you need to touch wounds or colostomy bags, you should do the following.

- Wash your hands, before and after.
 - Wear disposable gloves.
 - Make sure equipment is clean.
 - Clean the dirtiest things last.
- Avoid using antibiotics unless you really need to, as they do not work for colds or flu. You need to save antibiotics for times when you really need them or they won't work when you need them to.

Colds and coughs

- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands after coughing or sneezing.
- Always use disposable tissues or hankies when you have a cold.
- Get rid of tissues as soon as you've used them.
- Make sure you have a flu jab if you need it – ask your family doctor about this.
- Make sure your children are up to date with injections – ask your family doctor or public health nurse about this.



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Waste

You can treat most waste in your home as household waste. You can get rid of almost everything in the same way as you get rid of ordinary rubbish, as long as you put it in a small plastic bag before you put it in the bin.

You can get rid of the following in this way.

- Empty colostomy bags
- Empty urine bags
- Oxygen and nebuliser tubing and masks
- Pads and nappies

If you need to get rid of needles, you should get a special sharp-objects box from your local health centre which you can give back when it is full. You should keep needles and sharp objects stored safely away from children.

Water

You should make sure you keep your water storage tanks clean. Make sure you regularly clean out any dirt or limescale as they will give germs a place to live.

You should also do the following.

- Keep your water tank covered.
- At least once a week, turn on showers and the taps on baths and sinks that you don't regularly use. This will get rid of any germs.
- If you use water filters for your drinking water, you should change them regularly.
- If you have your own private water supply such as a bored well, you should have it tested once a year to check for germ levels.
- If you are a farmer spreading slurry, you need to follow the 'Good farming code of practice'.



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Safety

The information in this booklet is a guide. We think good hand washing and housekeeping are the best ways of preventing infection.

If you have any specific questions about infections, you should ask your family doctor.

You should follow the manufacturer's instructions if you use chemicals, and keep them where your children can't get them. You can get organic and environmentally-friendly cleaning products from most shops.

remember
wash
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hands