GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Antibiotic or antimicrobial agent: a product that kills or suppresses the growth of microorganisms.

An Antiseptic: refers to disinfectants that are applied to the skin or to living tissues, but as the purpose of antiseptics is to disinfect i.e. skin disinfection, the word antiseptic is less frequently used. It is useful as an indicator that the compound can be safely applied to tissues (Russell et al, 1999).

Acute wounds: include traumatic injuries such as burns, scalds, lacerations, abrasions (grazes) cuts and bites. Surgical wounds are intentional acute wounds.

Aseptic technique: Described as a method that prevents microbial contamination of wounds and other susceptible sites by ensuring that only sterile objects and fluids touch them. Aseptic technique reduces the risk of contamination to vulnerable sites thus helping to reduce healthcare associated infection.

Carrier: a person who harbours a microorganism in the absence of signs or symptoms or obvious disease. Carriers may shed organisms into the environment and act as a potential source of infection.

Case: a person with symptoms.

Catheter Valve: A valve connected to the catheter outlet allowing the bladder to be used to store urine. Urine is drained by opening the valve at regular intervals.

Chronic wounds: occur when acute wounds fail to heal within the expected time, and are usually associated with underlying pathologies which delay the healing process such as leg ulcers, pressure sores and malignant tumours.

Cleaning: a process which removes visible soil, contamination and thereby reduces the number of micro-organisms from a surface or device. Cleaning is carried out using either water, mechanical action and detergents or by using an energy-based process (e.g. ultrasonic cleaners) with appropriate agents. Cleaning must precede disinfection and sterilisation.

Cohort: a group of patients infected or colonized with the same microorganism grouped together in a designated area of a unit or ward and are suitable roommates.

Colonisation: The presence of multiplying micro-organisms without tissue invasion or damage and without the individual demonstrating any signs or symptoms.

Contamination: the soiling of inanimate objects or living material with harmful, potentially infectious or unwanted matter.
**Cross-Infection:** Infection acquired in hospital from other people, either patients, staff or visitors. Food and the environment may also be factors in cross-infection (Ayliffe et al, 2000; Mallett, J. and Dougherty, L., 2001).

**Disinfection:** the inactivation of disease-producing microorganisms but which may not necessarily inactivate some microbial agents (e.g. spores and prions). Disinfection usually involves chemicals, heat or ultraviolet light. Cleaning must be carried out before disinfection.

A **Disinfectant:** is a chemical or physical agent which can destroy micro-organisms and viruses.

**Epidemic:** A widespread outbreak of an infectious disease. Many people are infected at the same time.

**Epidemiology:** the study of the occurrence, cause, control and prevention of disease in populations.

**HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points):** is a structured system set up to analyse potential hazards and identify the points where hazards may occur, implementing changes as required and periodically reviewing the system. A critical point is a point in the operation at which control can be exercised to eliminate or minimise a hazard- this system should rapidly detect any failures in the procedures (National Standards Authority of Ireland, 1994).

**Healthcare Associated Infection** are infections that are acquired as a result of healthcare interventions.

**Hospital Acquired Infection:** is an infection that is neither present nor incubating on admission to hospital. Also referred to as nosocomial infection.

**Immunocompromised:** Impaired immune response that renders a person particularly susceptible to infection.

**Incubation Period:** The time interval between initial exposure to the infectious agent and the appearance of the first sign or symptoms of the disease in the susceptible person.

**Infection:** the term infection is used to refer to the deposition and multiplication of bacteria and other micro-organisms in tissues or on the surfaces of the body with an associated host reaction.

**Infectious Disease:** a disease caused by a microorganism that can be passed from a person, animal or the environment to another susceptible individual.

**Invasive medical device** is an object which is used for diagnostic or therapeutic purposes which penetrates or breaks the skin or a body cavity (HIQA, 2009).
Medical and non medical equipment – all products and consumables, except medicines, used in healthcare for the diagnosis, prevention, monitoring or treatment of illness or disability (HIQA, 2009).

Microorganism: any organism that is too small to be visible to the naked eye, e.g. bacteria, fungi, viruses and protozoa.
  • Transient microorganisms: are superficial, transferred easily to and from hands, recognised as an important source of infection but are removed easily with good handwashing
  • Resident microorganisms: are deep-seated, difficult to remove, part of the body's natural defence mechanism and associated with infection following surgery or invasive procedures.

Normal bacteria flora: the bacteria that normally live on and in the skin, gut, mouth and upper respiratory tract of humans. Also called commensal organisms, they do not normally cause disease and provide some protection from disease. When antimicrobial agents are used to treat infectious disease, they can affect the normal bacterial flora and their ability to provide protection from infection.

Outbreak of infection: An outbreak may be defined as
  • two or more linked cases of the same illness or
  • the situation where the observed number of cases exceeds the expected number or
  • a single case of disease caused by a significant pathogen e.g diphtheria.
    (Health Protection Surveillance Centre, 2011)

Outbreak committee: a multidisciplinary group of people from within and outside the service responsible for the management of outbreaks and which reports to senior management.

Pandemic: An epidemic that is geographically widespread, occurring throughout a region or even throughout the world.

Pathogenic: Potentially disease producing micro-organisms. The ability to cause infection depends on the virulence of the microbe, the number present and the patients' immune defences.

Prevalence: the number of instances of a particular disease or other condition at a particular time.

Risk Assessment: To successfully control infection in healthcare settings it is necessary to identify hazards, classify risks and develop risk management and communication strategies to control the risks.

Risk Management: is described as a practical approach to prevention of the possibility of incurring risks (incurring misfortune or loss). The purpose of risk management is to minimise the risk of exposure of the healthcare worker, patient
or visitor to sources of infection, including blood or body fluids in the healthcare setting.

**Septicaemia:** A serious and often life threatening condition arising from the present and persistence of bacteria (or their toxins) in the blood stream.

**Sharps:** Categorised as any object that has been used in the diagnosis, treatment or prevention of disease and that is likely to cause a puncture wound or cut to the skin. Examples include used needles, scalpels, razors, lancets, contaminated broken glass, stitch cutters or any other contaminated disposable sharp instrument or item” (pg.34 Department of Health & Children, 2004)

**Skin disinfectant:** an antiseptic that is intended for application to intact, healthy skin to prevent the transmission of transient or resident bacteria from person to person or from a surgical operation to underlying tissue. Skin disinfectants include antimicrobial and antiseptic soaps and alcohol hand rubs.

**Soil:** visible dirt or debris, which may protect, harbour or assist the growth of micro-organisms. Includes organic matter, residual oil and blood and body fluids.

**Sterilisation:** complete destruction of all microorganisms, including spores.

**Suprapubic catheter:** Suprapubic catheterization creates a tunnel from the abdominal wall to the bladder. Urine can then be drained directly from the bladder into a bag through this tunnel.

**Transmission of infection:** requires three elements: a source of infecting micro-organisms, a susceptible host and a means of transmission for the micro-organism. Micro-organisms are transmitted by several routes and the same micro-organisms may be transmitted by more than one route. There are five main routes of transmission- contact, droplet, airborne, common vehicle and vector borne.

**Urethral Catheter:** is a hollow bore tube inserted into the urinary bladder for the purpose of draining urine or instilling fluids as part of medical treatment.

- **Indwelling (urethral) catheter:** A catheter that is inserted into the bladder via the urethra and remains in place for a period of time.

- **Short-term catheter** is one that is left in place for < 10 days, after which the temporary indication that prompted catheterisation in the first place no longer applies.

- **Long term catheter** is one that has been left in place for > 28 days.

**Window period:** the period immediately after a person is infected with an agent, during which the infection is not detectable by laboratory tests, although the person may be infectious.

**Virulence:** The ability of the species or strain to cause disease.
**Virus:** a very small microorganism that can only survive and multiply within a living cell.