

Working together to reduce Health Care Associated Infection (HCAI)

Infection Control Department



Patient information leaflet

This leaflet explains what Health Care Associated Infections (HCAIs) are, what's being done to prevent them and how you as the patient can prevent them.

What is a HCAI?

Health care associated infections (HCAIs) are caused by a wide range of micro-organisms (germs) and are associated with medical or surgical treatment, or from being in contact with a healthcare setting where treatment is given i.e. in hospital, GP surgery or even the patient's own home.

How common is a HCAI?

Large national studies of hospital patients have shown that approximately 6.5% of patients acquire a HCAI. This figure is similar to hospitals in the USA and the rest of Europe.

Why do patients get HCAIs?

The most important factor is how vulnerable the patient is. For example, people with diabetes, kidney failure or cancer have a lowered immunity as a result of their illness. They are at greater risk of infection. Elderly patients and the very young are also very vulnerable to certain infections.

To treat patients we often need to use devices such as drips and catheters. These can act as sites where organisms can enter the body.

All wounds including surgical wounds also provide a break in the skin's natural defence. These may become infected, usually with micro-organisms which were already present on the patient's skin: only a minority are from hospital or clinic.

It is therefore not possible to completely eliminate the chances of a HCAI, but it is possible to reduce it to a minimum.

Micro-organisms can also be spread on the hands of healthcare workers. Hands **MUST** be cleaned between each patient.

What we are doing to prevent HCAI?

All staff work very hard to make sure that your care is safe, in particular reducing the risks of infection to an absolute minimum.

Many procedures, such as operating theatre routines, aseptic dressing techniques, decontamination of equipment and sterilization of instruments, are good examples of measures taken to reduce infection.

Good hand hygiene (washing hands with soap and water or the use of alcohol sanitising foam) by all staff, also has a major part to play in reducing infection.

Environmental cleaning plays a relatively small part in the prevention of infection. However, the environment must be clean for general hygiene standards and professional image. Cleaning standards are monitored monthly.

There is a dedicated Infection Control Team who works closely with the Matrons and managers. This ensures that the Trust's high standards of Infection Control are delivered effectively.

There are regular infection control education sessions provided for all staff. Infection control audits are undertaken utilising the processes recommended by the Department of Health.

HCAIs are monitored closely and the more serious infections, including MRSA (meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) bacteraemias (MRSA in the blood) and *Clostridium difficile* (Cdiff), are reviewed to try to prevent further infections occurring.

With the exception of children, pregnant women and day cases, all hospital admissions are screened for MRSA carriage.

When patients have serious infections, we normally care for them in a single room to help prevent the spread of infection to other patients.

You as a patient or a visitor also have a part to play in helping to minimise HCAIs.

How can patients help?

Keeping your hands and body clean is important. If admitted to hospital bring your personal toiletries including soap with you.

Do not borrow or share toiletries.

- Wash your hands especially before eating and after going to the toilet.
- Have a supply of wet wipes - this will ensure that you can always clean your hands when you need to. You can also use the alcohol sanitising foam: in hospital this is available in all patient areas and at the end of your bed. Ask the nursing staff to show you how to use it.
- Inform the nursing staff if there is no alcohol sanitising foam at the end of your bed.
- Wear slippers when walking around this keeps your feet clean so that micro-organisms are not transferred from your feet to the bed.
- In hospital do not sit on other patients' beds – this provides an ideal opportunity for micro-organisms to spread.
- Keep all dressings dry
- Help us to keep the hospital clean by keeping your locker top and bed table clear of clutter so that the housekeeper can keep them free of dust.
- If you see any dirt or dust around your bed, or if the toilet or bathroom is dirty, please report this immediately to one of the nurses, ward sister or Matron.

Tell staff immediately if:

- A dressing becomes loose or wet
- A wound or intravenous drip site becomes sore or painful.

If a member of staff needs to examine you, do not be afraid to ask:

- if they have first cleaned their hands
- their gloves have been changed

If you do not feel able to do this, but think that a member of staff may not have cleaned their hands properly, please mention it to the ward Sister, Matron or senior member of staff.

Ask visitors to avoid coming in to see you if they are suffering from a cold, diarrhoea or vomiting, have a rash or any other infection.

How can visitors help?

- Wash your hands or use alcohol sanitising foam when entering the ward and again before you leave.
- Please do not visit if you have any signs of infection e.g. diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, a cold, rash or skin infection.
- Please do not use the patient's toilets; there are other toilets for public use.
- Please do not sit on the beds.

Key reference sources and for further information

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/healthcare-associated-infections-hcai-guidance-data-and-analysis>

Contact details

Infection Control Team

Royal Surrey County Hospital
Egerton Road, Guildford GU2 7XX

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 4580

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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