
Reducing the
risk of healthcare
associated
infection

Patient Information





Introduction

Picking up an infection in hospital is a concern for many patients. The Royal Marsden takes the safety of our patients very seriously. That means doing everything we can to reduce the risk of anyone acquiring an infection while they are in our care. Infection prevention is regarded as everyone's responsibility and the Trust's board is committed to supporting staff in preventing infections.

This leaflet offers general information about infections and what you can do to help prevent them. Separate leaflets about MRSA and Clostridium difficile are also available.

What is healthcare associated infection (HCAI)?

Healthcare associated infections (HCAI) are infections that develop as a result of medical or surgical treatment. They can occur in hospitals or community healthcare settings and can affect both patient's visitors and healthcare workers.

An infection occurs when a germ (bacterium, fungi or virus) enters the body and attacks or causes damage to the whole body or part of it. Most germs are found in the environment or on the body as 'normal flora', and are generally harmless. However there is an increased risk of germs entering our bodies when we are receiving healthcare. This can be for several reasons including:

- Sometimes the normal flora can cause infection if they get into the wrong place, for example *E.coli* from the gut causing a urine infection or *Staphylococcus aureus* causing a boil.
- Harmful bacteria may be spread from dirty environments, dirty equipment or by poor hand hygiene practice.
- Use of invasive devices that enter the body and breach the normal body defenses such as intravenous lines (drips), catheters or surgical drains.
- Breaches of the skin such as surgical wounds or psoriasis.
- A weakened immune system through illness or drug treatment such as chemotherapy.
- Extremes of age; older people and the very young may be more susceptible to infection because of weakened immunity
- The use of antibiotics can damage the normal flora leaving space for harmful organisms.

Reducing the risk of HCAI and patient safety is a top priority for The Royal Marsden.

How do the hospital staff prevent the spread of HCAI?

The Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPCT) work closely with the clinical teams ensuring high quality standards are maintained. The IPCT monitor infection within the Trust.

All our staff, including senior managers, matrons and doctors, are committed to protecting patients from infection and the Trust has clear standards in infection prevention which include:

- Strict hand hygiene before and after contact with each patient or their environment.
- Providing adequate hand hygiene facilities for staff and patients.
- Providing a clean hospital environment and good hygiene practice.
- Isolation of patients in single rooms, when necessary, to reduce the risk of infection.
- Careful prescription of antimicrobial medications to reduce the risk of bacterial resistance developing.
- Training on infection prevention and control for all our staff.
- New patients who are having invasive treatments such as chemotherapy or surgery are screened to check for MRSA. Patients who are admitted to the hospital are also screened.
- Patients who have come from overseas or have been treated in an overseas hospital are screened for resistant bacteria which may be in their gut.
- Taking specimens such as blood samples, urine samples and wound swabs as appropriate.



What can patients and their visitors do to help?

There are a number of things that you can do to help you from getting an unnecessary infection.

Everyone

- Clean your hands frequently throughout the day using soap and water or the alcohol handrub provided.
- Always wash your hands with soap and warm water after going to the toilet. Hand rub is not recommended after a visit to the toilet.
- Please ask staff caring for you whether they have cleaned their hands. It is Trust policy that all staff caring for you are 'bare below the elbows'. You may also ask them to roll up their sleeves and remove watches and jewellery to ensure hand hygiene is carried out effectively.
- Bath or shower daily and wash your hair regularly. Change your towel regularly.
- Please inform the matron or your nurse if you are concerned about any aspect of hygiene or cleanliness in our premises.
- Inform your nurse if your dressing becomes loose, falls off or becomes wet or blood-stained.
- If your intravenous line, drain or catheter becomes painful or dislodged, please alert your nurse or doctor.

- Inform your nurse if you have any signs of possible infection, such as a wound that is hot, red or showing signs of pus, or if you have symptoms such as diarrhoea or vomiting.

Extra information for Inpatients

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water or use the cleansing hand wipe provided on your meal tray before eating and drinking.
- Use your own toiletries and never share these with others.
- Wear slippers. This will ensure that bacteria from the floor do not transfer to your bedding.
- Do not sit on other patients' beds.
- Keep bed areas clutter free to assist the cleaners and nurses in keeping your bed space clean and free of dust.

Extra information for Outpatients

- If you are at home and you have symptoms of diarrhoea or vomiting, please phone before attending for your appointment. If it is not urgent, we may postpone your visit for a few days.

Extra information for Visitors

- Visitors must check with the nursing staff before entering a room and always follow advice about what precautions to take.
- Clean your hands using the handrub when entering and leaving the ward.
- Closely supervise any children and



do not allow them to touch any equipment.

- Please **do not visit** if you are suffering from a cold, flu, diarrhoea, stomach upset, rash or if you have had recently had or been in contact with an infectious disease such as chicken pox or measles. If in doubt, please phone the ward to discuss.
- Do not bring in cooked food to the hospital for patients. This is because bacteria multiply as the food cools and they can cause food poisoning. This is especially important for patients that are undergoing transplantation procedures as they need special diets.

Who can I talk to about HCAI?

If you would like more information, or if you have any questions or concerns about HCAI please talk to your doctor or nurse or ask to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on **020 8661 3248**.

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

References

If you have any questions about the references used in writing this booklet, please call:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre on

Freephone: 0800 783 7176 or

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

Should you require information in an alternative format please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.



The patient information service is generously supported by The Royal Marsden Charity.
royalmarsden.org
Registered Charity No.1095197

Revised October 2016

Planned review: October 2019

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IC-0980-06

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

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