



Be infection aware

Reducing the risk of getting an infection in hospital or when you go home

Who is at risk?

People who need treatment in a hospital or clinic are often more vulnerable to infection than most other people. This may be because the illness they have or the treatment they need has weakened their resistance.

A 'healthcare-associated' infection is an infection that you pick up after having contact with a healthcare service. Most often, this happens if you have had treatment in a hospital. It can also happen after treatment in outpatient clinics, nursing homes and other healthcare settings.

Any patient in any hospital or healthcare facility in the world is at risk of picking up a new infection when they are there.

What causes the bugs and infections?

Some of these new healthcare-associated infections are caused by your own bacteria (bugs). They are usually harmless for healthy people. Others are caused by antibiotic-resistant hospital bugs – 'superbugs'. You can pick them up in hospital from contact with other patients, or from contact with hospital staff and equipment. In a big hospital looking after very sick people, about 1 in 20 patients has a healthcare associated infection.

Can bugs and infections be stopped?

No hospital in the world can stop all these infections from happening. Some can be stopped by putting strong systems in place to prevent hospital superbugs from spreading from one patient to another. Keeping your hands clean and keeping equipment clean is important in stopping hospital superbugs from spreading.

If the hospital knows that a patient has a superbug, they will take extra care of that person to help stop the bug from spreading. For example, a patient with a superbug will usually be given their own room and their own toilet if that is possible.

How do I know if I have a bug?

The only way to know if a person is carrying a superbug is to take a sample (swab) and test it in the laboratory. When we test for superbugs, we ask you if we can take a 'swab' from your nose, a wound,



your skin or back passage (bum). This is a simple procedure where we rub the swab – like a cotton bud – on your skin. It is important to know if you are carrying a superbug, as it can help your doctors to choose the best antibiotic treatment for you if you develop an infection in hospital. If you are carrying a superbug, you will notice that the hospital staff take extra precautions when caring for you, such as wearing gloves, aprons or gowns. This helps to reduce the risk of the bugs spreading to other patients. If you know you are carrying a superbug it is important to tell a member of staff when you come to hospital.

Many patients are tested for superbugs when they come into hospital. If you test positive, a doctor or nurse will tell you about the result. They will give you information that you can read and take home with you.

What can I do to protect myself?

These are some things you can do to protect yourself from picking up an infection or superbug while you are in hospital:

- Clean your hands regularly and use the hand sanitizer gel. Always do this after you go to the toilet and before you eat
- Do not share your personal things with other patients – for example, your phone, your earphones, and so on
- Keep away from other patients' beds
- Do not let anyone sit on your bed, and don't sit on another patient's bed
- It's OK to remind staff to clean their hands
- It's OK to tell a staff member if you see anything that is not clean

Sometimes, the hospital does not know that a person is carrying a superbug until after they have gone home. If we find out that you are carrying a superbug after you go home, we will write to you or tell you about it at a follow-up appointment. We will also let your GP know. If you have any questions about hospital infection or superbugs, please ask your doctor or nurse.

Further information

You can get further information on hand hygiene and watch a short video on proper hand washing on www.hse.ie/infectioncontrol

This information is approved for use by the HSE's Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control national programme. Text awarded Plain English mark from the National Adult Literacy Agency.

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