

Infection prevention and control

Information for patients and visitors

Many people coming into hospital are worried about getting an infection. Patients in hospital may be vulnerable to infections because of ill health and/or any medication/treatment that they are receiving. While not all infections can be prevented, most can be successfully treated.

Infection prevention and control is a top priority for East Kent Hospitals and we pride ourselves in having some of the lowest rates of infection in the country.

What causes infections?

Although we all carry bacteria on our skin, they can cause an infection if they enter our body at a place where they are not normally found. For example:

- Through a wound or a cut, including wounds/cuts made during an operation.
- Through a small break in the skin or through a device inserted into the body, such as an intravenous (IV) drip inserted into a vein, a drain inserted into an operation wound, or a urinary catheter inserted into the bladder.
- Through the respiratory tract when you have a cough, cold, or 'flu.
- Through the gastrointestinal tract, for example bacteria may be transferred from contaminated hands/fingers to our mouths, or eaten if present in food (food poisoning).

Who is at risk of infection?

Anyone can develop an infection but some patients in hospital are more likely to because their bodies' natural defences are weakened. For example:

- Patients who are having an operation/investigation.
- Patients who have drips, drains, or catheters inserted as part of their treatment.
- Patients who are already unwell when they are admitted to hospital because of their illness.
- Older people.



Why is keeping your hands clean important?

Making sure that hands are clean is the most important way of preventing the spread of infection.

- **Visitors.** Alcohol hand rub should be used when entering and leaving the ward. There is no need for young children to use the hand rub, but if they do they must be helped or closely watched to avoid splashing the hand rub into their eyes.
- **Patients.** As a general rule a pack of “wet wipes” are given to each patient when they are admitted to hospital. It is important that patients either wash their hands with soap and water or use the wet wipes before eating and after using the toilet/commode. Patients can also use the alcohol hand rub as long as their hands are visibly clean.
- **Staff** need to carry out hand hygiene practices, such as washing their hands with soap and water and drying effectively with paper towels and/or alcohol hand rub. Alcohol hand rub is regularly used as it offers a practical and acceptable alternative to handwashing in most situations.

Alcohol hand rub:

- is quick and easy to use
- is as effective as soap and water.

Soap and water:

- it takes 30 seconds to wash, rinse, and dry appropriately
- is very effective for cleaning hands.

The most important time for staff to clean their hands with alcohol hand rub is at the point of care, just before they have any direct contact with you. Please feel free to ask staff if they have cleaned their hands.

How do I use the alcohol hand rub?

1. Cup the palm of one hand directly under the pump dispenser (because the alcohol hand rub is a liquid, this is important to stop it dripping).
2. With your other hand, press the pump dispenser gently once to dispense the alcohol hand rub into the palm of your cupped hand.
3. Rub both hands together, covering all surfaces, until your hands are dry.

If you have trouble using the alcohol hand rub, please ask a member of staff to show you how.

How can I help prevent infection?

There are several things that patients and visitors can do to help us prevent infections.

- If you or close members of your family have been ill with diarrhoea and/or vomiting in the week before your admission to hospital, please let a member of staff know. It could be caused by a virus and you and/or family members may be infectious. The virus could infect other patients and staff on the ward.
- If any of your family or friends want to visit you in hospital and they are ill themselves (for example with colds/flu/rashes), please ask them not to visit until they are completely well.
- Please do not ask relatives or friends to bring very young children or babies in to hospital to visit you.
- If you have a wound, drip, and/or catheter, please do not touch them. You may spread bacteria that naturally live on one part of your body to another and this may cause an infection.
- Keeping yourself clean is important and can help to prevent infection. If you are coming in to hospital for a planned operation, please have a bath or shower before you come in. If you need help with washing or bathing when you are in hospital, please ask a member of nursing staff.
- Please keep your bedside table and locker tidy and uncluttered, so that the cleaning staff can clean it easily.
- To stop you and other patients getting an infection, you must not visit the hospital restaurant or hospital shop if:
 - you have any invasive devices such as an intravenous drip, drain, and/or urinary catheter; or
 - you are being nursed in a side room because you have an infection.
- If you have to be cared for in a side room because you have an infection, please do not leave your room without checking with your nurse first.
- The Trust does not have the facilities to store, reheat, or monitor the safety of food that is not prepared in the hospital. Sometimes, visitors bring food in from home for patients to eat, but if food has not been cooked at the correct temperature and stored/chilled properly, there is a risk of food poisoning. In order to reduce this risk, visitors should carry any cold food (such as sandwiches, yoghurts, and cold desserts) in a cool box, and the food should be eaten within one hour of arrival at the hospital. Hot food should be carried in a thermal insulated container and must be eaten within 30 minutes of arrival at the hospital.
- Visitors should use the toilets signposted for visitors use and not the toilets on the ward, as these are for patients only.
- There are no infection risks associated with flowers or plants in hospital. However, as space at the patient's bedside is often limited, please speak to the ward manager before you bring flowers onto the ward.

Further Information

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to either the nurse-in-charge of the ward or the matron. If they are unable to help you or you need further information, please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on:

- **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM) Hospital**, Margate
Telephone: 01843 22 55 44 extension 725-3625
- **Kent and Canterbury Hospital**, Canterbury
Telephone: 01227 86 40 49
- **William Harvey Hospital**, Ashford
Telephone: 01233 63 33 31 extension 723-8202 or 723-8198

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation