

## PREVENTING AN INFECTION WHILE IN THE HOSPITAL

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Germs are everywhere. These tiny particles, usually too small to see, get passed from person to person through touch, a wound, a cough, a sneeze, and can travel through the air or live on a surface.

When you are healthy, your body can usually fight off the many germs that are part of our everyday environment. But if they enter your body while you are in a weakened state, like when you are in the hospital for illness or surgery, these germs can easily cause an infection.

During your hospital stay, take steps to protect yourself and others from germs. Stop infection in its tracks.

Each time you cough or sneeze, catch it in the nook of your elbow. The germs will not get passed to others from your hands.

But germs may still be on the surface you touch, so wash your hands with soap and water or use the waterless hand sanitizers available in the hospital. To further protect yourself from infection and take an active role in infection prevention, make sure all hospital staff washes their hands before and after treating you.

*“So by all means, you know, ask the physicians and the nurses, ‘Have you washed your hands?’ And if they say no, or you haven’t seen them at their sinks, then certainly ask them to. The best thing you can do though is speak up.”*

Speak up when visitors come to see you as well. Remind them to cleanse their hands each time they come into your room and each time they leave.

And if you know a family member or friend would like to visit but has a cold, scratchy throat, or other type of illness, ask them to stay at home. Your job is to recover and heal without the complication of an infection. The sooner you heal, the sooner you can visit with them in the comfort of your own home.

Another way to prevent infections is to ensure anyone treating or visiting you is wearing proper protective equipment, like gloves. Gloves should be worn every time a healthcare provider treats you – and only you. Gloves are single-use. That means they must be thrown away after being used just once.

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And wearing gloves does not mean your healthcare providers can skip washing their hands or using the waterless hand sanitizers. They should cleanse their hands before they put gloves on and immediately after they take them off, to prevent the spread of infection.

If you are scheduled for surgery during your hospital stay, staff will take special steps to prevent the spread of infection, and the surgical site will be washed with a special soap. If you have a scratchy throat or think you may be getting a cold or the flu, tell your healthcare provider before surgery. Antibiotics given just before surgery can help prevent infections.

While in the hospital, don't let a complication like an infection get in the way of your recovery. Do all you can to prevent the spread of germs and stay healthy.