

For Hospital Patients: Preventing the Spread of Gastrointestinal Infections

You have a gastrointestinal (GI) infection. Certain viruses and bacteria such as *Clostridioides difficile* (C. diff) can infect the GI tract. They can cause diarrhea, fever, vomiting, and other symptoms. Many of these germs are spread through touch. They may be spread by hands or from contact with a tainted surface or object.

Your healthcare providers will take steps to prevent the spread of these germs. These precautions are important for your health and others. They help protect healthcare providers, other patients, and visitors from serious infections.

What to expect

While you are in the hospital, your healthcare providers may take these steps to prevent the spread of germs:

- You may be given a private room and bathroom. You may be asked to stay in your room at all times, except for tests or other needed procedures. Doing so will help isolate the infection and prevent its spread.
- If you need to leave the room, you may be asked to change your gown. You may also have to wear other protective clothing or equipment.
- Your room will be cleaned and disinfected at least once a day. Items you often touch or come into contact with, such as bedrails, doorknobs, and sinks, will also be disinfected.
- Your healthcare providers will put on new gloves when they enter your room. They may also put on a gown when working directly with you. They will dispose of these items before they leave.
- Your healthcare providers may frequently change their gloves and wash their hands with soap and water. Doing so helps prevent cross-contamination of objects and surfaces.
- Family members and other visitors may be asked to wear a gown and gloves when they visit you.



What you can do

You can do your part to help prevent the spread of the infection. Always wash your hands well with soap and water. Some germs like *C. diff* can stay on your hands after you use the bathroom and then spread to any person, surface, or object you touch. Alcohol-based cleaners may not work, especially against *C. diff*.

When washing your hands, rinse them first. Then scrub with soap for at least 20 seconds. Make sure you clean the top of your hands, around your fingers, and under your fingernails. Rinse your hands well and dry them. Use a paper towel, if available.

Always wash your hands:

- After using the bathroom
- Before and after eating
- After touching any object or surface that may have germs on it
- After coughing or sneezing

Make sure family members and other visitors wash their hands, too. If someone forgets, including healthcare providers, don't hesitate to politely remind them.