



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 more likely to get infections due to:

- ill health, and / or
- any medication / treatment that they are having.

While not all infections can be prevented, most can be successfully treated.

Infection prevention and control is a top priority for East Kent Hospitals. **There are things we can all do to help prevent the spread of infections.**

What causes infections?

We all carry germs (such as bacteria and viruses) on our skin. These germs 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, for example:
 - 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 can be transferred from contaminated hands / fingers to our mouths, or
 - eaten if present in food, leading to food poisoning.

Who is at risk of infection?

Anyone can develop an infection. Some patients in hospital are more likely to, as 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.
- Older people.

Why is keeping my hands clean important?

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

- **Visitors** must use alcohol hand rub when entering and leaving the ward. There is no need for young children to use the hand rub. 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 seen to be clean.

- **Staff** must wash their hands with soap and water, and dry them well with paper towels and / or alcohol hand rub.

Alcohol hand rub is used, as it offers a practical and acceptable alternative to handwashing in most cases.

Alcohol hand rub

- Is quick and easy to use.
- Works better than soap and water. However, if somebody has diarrhoea (poo is loose / runny and watery) soap and water is the best way to remove the germs and dirt.

Soap and water

- It takes 30 seconds to wash, rinse, and dry appropriately.
- Works well at 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 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. Alcohol hand rub is a liquid, so this is important to stop it dripping.

2. With your other hand, press the pump dispenser gently once.
3. Rub both hands together, covering all surfaces with alcohol hand rub, until your hands are dry.

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

How can I help prevent infection?

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

- **In the week before your admission to hospital, have you or close members of your family have been ill with diarrhoea and / or vomiting. If so, please tell a member of staff.** The illness 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 your family or friends want to visit you in hospital and they are ill, please ask them not to visit until they are completely well. This includes illnesses such as colds, 'flu, or rashes.
- Please ask visitors **not** to bring very young children or babies into hospital to visit you.
- If you have a wound, drip, and / or catheter, please do not touch them. You may spread bacteria that naturally lives on one part of your body to another. This may cause an infection.
- **It is important to keep yourself clean.** Keeping clean can help to prevent infection. If you are coming in to hospital for a planned operation, please have a bath or shower before you arrive. If you need help with washing or bathing when you are in hospital, please ask a member of staff.
- Please keep your bedside table and locker tidy and uncluttered. This allows cleaning staff to clean the area easily. Please bring only essential belongings and toiletries with you. Ask visitors to take things home when you no longer need them.
- To stop you and other patients getting an infection, do not visit the hospital's restaurant or shop if:
 - You have any invasive devices that are not covered. An invasive device could be an intravenous (IV) drip, a drain, or a urinary catheter.
 - You are being nursed in a side room, as you have an infection.
- **Patients being cared for in a side room due to an infection.** Do not leave your room without checking with your nurse first.
- The Trust does not have the equipment to store, reheat, or monitor the safety of food not prepared in the hospital. If visitors bring food in from home for patients to eat, and the food has not been cooked at the correct temperature and stored / chilled properly, this can cause food poisoning.

To reduce this risk, visitors must carry any cold food (such as sandwiches, yoghurts, and cold desserts) in a cool box. Please eat this food within one hour of it arriving at the hospital. Carry hot food in a thermal insulated container. Hot food must be eaten within 30 minutes of it arriving at the hospital.
- **Visitors must only use the toilets signposted for visitors use.** Visitors must not use the toilets on the ward, these are for patients only.

- Do not bring flowers into hospital. Stagnant water and decomposing flowers can increase your risk of developing an infection. It also helps with reducing bedside clutter, and allows the cleaners to clean the wards more effectively.

Further Information

If you have any questions, please speak to the nurse-in-charge of the ward or the matron. If they cannot help you or you need further information, please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team.

- **Kent and Canterbury Hospital**, Canterbury
Telephone: 01227 766877 extension 722-4216 or 722-6810
- **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM) Hospital**, Margate
Telephone: 01843 225544 extension 725-3625 or 725-4234
- **William Harvey Hospital**, Ashford
Telephone: 01233 633331 extension 723-8202 or 723-8198

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.

Please let us know:

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

You can let us know this by:

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email (ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net).

Patients should not bring 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 has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient information leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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