

Avoiding Healthcare-Associated Infections

CDC Offers 10 Ways to Avoid Infection when Receiving Medical Care

People receiving medical care sometimes develop infections so serious they may lead to sepsis or death. It can happen in any medical facility such as a hospital, outpatient clinic, dialysis center, or long-term care facility. These are called healthcare-associated infections – and are often associated with devices used in medical procedures, such as catheters or ventilators.

Healthcare-associated infections can be caused by bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics, making them difficult to treat. Although national progress is being made to prevent these infections, there's more to do, especially in fighting antibiotic-resistant bacteria.



As a patient, you can help prevent the spread of infections and improve antibiotic use. Here are 10 things you can do to protect yourself and your loved ones:

- 1. Speak up.** Talk to your doctor about any questions or worries. Ask what they're doing to protect you.
- 2. Keep hands clean.** Make sure everyone, including friends and family, clean their hands before touching you. If you don't see your healthcare providers clean their hands, ask them to do so.
- 3. Ask each day if your central line catheter or urinary catheter is necessary.** Leaving a catheter in place too long increases the chances you'll get an infection. Let your doctor or nurse know immediately if the area around the central line becomes sore or red, or if the bandage falls off or looks wet or dirty.
- 4. Prepare for surgery.** Let your doctor know about any medical problems you have. Ask your doctor how he/she prevents surgical site infections.
- 5. Get smart about antibiotics.** Antibiotics only treat bacterial infections – they don't work for viruses like the ones that cause colds and flu. Ask your healthcare provider if there are steps you can take to feel better without using antibiotics. If you're prescribed an antibiotic, make sure to take it exactly as your healthcare provider tells you and do not skip doses.
- 6. Ask your healthcare provider, "Will there be a new needle, new syringe, and a new vial for this procedure or injection?"** Insist that your healthcare providers never reuse a needle or syringe on more than one patient.
- 7. Watch out for deadly diarrhea (Clostridium difficile).** Tell your doctor if you have 3 or more diarrhea episodes in 24 hours, especially if you've been taking an antibiotic.
- 8. Know the signs and symptoms of infection.** Some skin infections, such as MRSA, appear as redness, pain, or drainage at an IV catheter site or surgery site and come with a fever. Infections can also lead to sepsis, a complication caused by the body's overwhelming and life-threatening response to an infection.
- 9. Get Vaccinated.** Getting yourself, family, friends, and caregivers vaccinated against the flu and other infections prevents spread of disease.
- 10. Cover your mouth and nose.** When you sneeze or cough, germs can travel 3 feet or more. Use a tissue to avoid spreading germs with your hands.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention