

# SPEAK UP FOR BETTER SAFER HEALTH CARE

## Avoiding Infections



When you are unwell or recovering in hospital, the last thing you want is to get an infection which can delay your recovery or discharge date.

### What's in this brochure?

This brochure provides some helpful suggestions on how you can avoid infections during your hospital stay and beyond.

### Going to hospital

#### What can I do?

Ask your doctor or surgeon about how you can help reduce the risk of infections.

#### Safe hair removal (pre-surgery)

Clippers should be used to remove hair at the site of surgery. Using a razor may leave small cuts on the skin which can cause infection. If you are preparing for surgery do not shave the surgical site unless instructed by your treating doctor.

#### Should I stop smoking?

Yes, smoking can slow down the healing process and increases the risk for chest infections. If you are a smoker, try to quit smoking at least 30 days before you enter hospital, or reduce the number of cigarettes you are smoking. This is particularly important if you are undergoing surgery.

#### What about contact with other patients and visitors?

Avoid close contact with people who have an infectious condition, and ask people not to visit you if they are sick. Make sure that your visitors wash their hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub when they arrive, and before they leave the hospital.

Make sure healthcare providers clean their hands and wear gloves

Doctors, nurses, dentists and other healthcare providers come into contact with lots of bacteria and viruses. Hands are the most likely way that infections can be passed from one person to the next.

Healthcare providers should wear clean gloves when they perform tasks such as taking throat cultures, pulling teeth, taking blood, touching wounds or body fluids, and examining your private parts. Don't be afraid to remind them to wear gloves or wash their hands.

### At home

Here are four easy things you can do to fight the spread of infection.

#### 1. Clean your hands

Cleaning your hands regularly, particularly before touching or eating food, and after you have:

- > used the bathroom
- > taken out the rubbish
- > changed a nappy
- > handled money
- > played with a pet.

Use soap and warm water and rub your hands really well for at least 15 seconds. Alternatively, you can use an alcohol-based hand lotion to cleanse your hands. You can buy alcohol-based hand lotion from your local pharmacy or supermarket. Rub the lotion

all over your hands, especially under your nails and between your fingers, until your hands are dry.

#### 2. Cover your mouth and nose

Many diseases are spread through sneezes and coughs. When you sneeze or cough, the germs can travel three feet or more. Cover your mouth and nose to prevent the spread of infection to others.

- > Use a tissue. Keep tissues handy at home, at work and in your pocket. Be sure to discard your tissues thoughtfully and then clean your hands.
- > If you don't have a tissue, cover your mouth and nose with the bend of your elbow or with your hands. If you use your hands, wash them right away.

#### 3. If you are sick, avoid close contact

- > If you are sick, stay away from other people. Stay home if you have a fever.
- > When you go for medical treatment, call ahead and ask if there's anything you can do to avoid infecting people in the waiting room.

#### 4. Keep up to date with your vaccinations

Influenza, or the "flu" is seasonal. The flu is caused by a virus that can cause mild to severe respiratory illness and may cause death in very vulnerable people, such as the very young, elderly, and those with certain chronic diseases. Every year a new strain of flu is associated with illness, which is the reason for annual vaccination with the influenza vaccine. Remember to receive this vaccination annually.

The pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for select high risk individuals. The pneumococcal vaccine provides protection against the most common strains responsible for most cases of pneumococcal disease in children and the elderly in Australia.

Ensuring up to date vaccinations for children is the best way to prevent childhood infections.

The above four steps can help prevent the spread of colds, the flu\*, and diseases like:

- > Pneumonia\*
- > Whooping cough\*
- > Chicken pox\*
- > Tuberculosis
- > Strep throat
- > Mumps\*
- > Measles\*
- > Rubella\* (also known as German measles)

\* Remember to keep your immunisations up to date to prevent or reduce the risk of this infection.

Additional information is available from your GP or immunisation provider, the Immunisation Infoline on 1800 671 811 or the Immunise Australia Program website at [www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au).

Adapted from: Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organization (2005). Four things you can do to prevent infection. ([www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/Speakup/](http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/Speakup/)).

WA Department of Health, Office of Safety and Quality in Health (2006). Patient First Program. ([http://www.safetyandquality.health.wa.gov.au/docs/patient\\_first\\_program/PatientFirstBooklet.pdf](http://www.safetyandquality.health.wa.gov.au/docs/patient_first_program/PatientFirstBooklet.pdf))

The information contained in this document is general in nature and comprises suggestions for how you may actively participate in ensuring that you receive the best quality healthcare. It is intended as a guide and does not cover every possible circumstance. Your GP, specialists, nurses and other healthcare providers are the persons who are best placed to provide you with specific advice in relation to your particular medical condition and health.