HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTION

Information for Public and Patients

STOP THE SPREAD OF INFECTIONS

Proper hand cleaning is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of infections.

So the next time you visit a relative or friend in a hospital or a nursing home, the first thing you should do when you arrive is clean your hands. If you need help, ask a member of staff.Healthcare workers should also clean their hands before and after attending to each patient.

EVERYBODY IS RESPONSIBLE

Clean your hands - say no to infection!

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

WHAT IS A HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTION?

A Health Care Associated infection is an infection that someone gets after being in hospital or after receiving medical treatment. Health care associated infections that are picked-up in hospital are also known as "hospital-acquired infections".

Health Care Associated infections are most often linked to treatment in hospitals, but can happen after treatment in outpatient clinics, nursing homes and other healthcare settings.

ARE HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS A NEW PROBLEM?

No. Infections have always been a side effect of medical treatment, especially in hospitals. Health Care Associated infections may have been just as common, or even more common, in the past, but may not have been spotted or reported. We are more aware of health care associated infections today, because we are better able to spot and report these infections now than in the past.

There are reasons why health care associated infections are still a problem, such as:

- More 'high risk' people are being treated than ever before, such as elderly patients or patients with severe or long-term diseases.
- Better medical treatments allow us to treat diseases that, in the past, could not be cured.
  These treatments may save people's lives but at the same time may leave them more at risk of getting an infection
- More patient movement between wards due to pressures on hospital beds.
- More use of antibiotics and the emergence of antibiotic-resistant germs.

HOW COMMON ARE HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS?

About one in ten patients who are admitted to hospital develop an infection. This figure varies from time to time. It can also vary between hospitals and between types of patients. For example, patients in the Intensive Care Unit are more likely to develop an infection than those in other parts of the hospital, because they are usually sicker and have more risk factors.

WHAT SORTS OF PATIENTS DEVELOP HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS?

The more medical care a person requires, the more likely they are to develop an infection. Health Care Associated infections are most common in people with serious illnesses or risk factors, such as:

- Patients with large wounds, following surgery, burns or a serious accident
- Patients who are on a drip (intravenous line) or other medical device for a long period of time
- Patients with a weakened immune system, like patients who have been treated for leukaemia or cancer, or who have had a transplant Patients who do not have a serious illness and are admitted to hospital for a short time are at low risk of developing infection.

WHAT TYPES OF HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS ARE THERE?

The most common is bladder or kidney infection, usually following the insertion of a catheter or a tube to help drain urine. Other types of Health Care Associated infection include pneumonia, which can happen in the Intensive Care Unit where a patient is on a life-support machine, surgical wound infection, which may follow major surgery, device-related infection which can happen when an intravascular device ('drip') is used and bacteremia ('blood poisoning').

WHAT IMPACT DO HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS HAVE?

Most common Health Care Associated infections only cause a minor illness that is easily treated and does not have any long-term effects. However, some Health Care Associated infections can cause serious illness that can lead to a person having to stay in hospital longer and result in long-term ill effects. Some of the less common types of Health Care Associated infection, such as pneumonia or blood poisoning, can cause very serious illness and, unfortunately, sometimes death.

HOW ARE HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS PREVENTED AND CONTROLLED?

About one third of Health Care Associated infections can be prevented. The best way to prevent infection is through good professional practice including hand-hygiene and appropriate care when dealing with patients. Some patients with Health Care Associated infections may require isolation (i.e. placing a patient in a single room to keep them from other patients). Most hospitals check these infections to make sure that control measures are working, and there is ongoing education for doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals.

WHERE CAN I FIND FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS?

The doctors and nurses on the ward on which you are being cared for can provide you with more information on Health Care Associated infections. The local infection control team can also provide additional information.

General information on Health Care Associated infections is also available from the following websites:

- *Health Service Executive www.hse.ie*
- *Health Protection Surveillance Centre www.hpsc.ie*
- *Health Protection Agency (UK) www.hpa.org.uk*
- *Centers for Disease Control and prevention (USA) www.cdc.gov*

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