NHS
Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Preventing the spread of infection – advice for patients and visitors

The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust takes infection prevention and control very seriously. This leaflet explains ways you can contribute towards preventing the spread of infection through your hospital.

How can patients and visitors help?

The best way you can help contribute to preventing micro-organisms passing from one patient to another is by **washing your hands**.

Some bacteria survive in the skin scales on the body which are then shed. In hospital these are most likely to be shed onto bed sheets or toiletries. These bacteria can be picked up by your skin or clothing and transferred to you.

- Launder your clothes properly (see advice in this leaflet).
- Do not share toiletries i.e. soap or towels.
- Do not sit on beds belonging to other patients.
- Visitors should use the chairs provided rather than sit on the beds.

If you have any wound dressings, stitches, drips or urinary catheters try not to touch them unnecessarily. This will prevent micro-organisms being transferred from your hands to these vulnerable sites. Follow the advice given by the staff caring for you.

- Comply with visiting times and number of visitors. This allows ward/departmental cleaning to occur and infection risks due to overcrowding to be reduced.
- Limit the amount of personal belongings that are brought into hospital. Storage on the wards is limited and it becomes difficult to clean areas if they are cluttered.
- **Do not visit the ward if you are ill, have an infection (e.g. COVID-19), have an infectious rash or have recently had diarrhoea or vomiting. If you have had diarrhoea and/or vomiting, please do not visit friends / relatives until 48 hours have lapsed from your last symptoms.**
- While you are visiting at the hospital please do not use the patients' toilets. There are separate toilets for visitors.
- Please help us keep our hospitals clean and tidy. By disposing of waste (for example used tissues or sweet wrappers) in the black / clear household waste bins provided.
- We would prefer food not to be brought in from home. However, we do recognise that this does happen; unfortunatelywe cannot reheat any foods not prepared in the hospital nor share them with other patients due to the risk of food poisoning. Food brought in from home should be labelled with the patient's name and date of preparation. Expired food will be destroyed.

How do we care for patients with infections?

Sometimes it is necessary to care for patients using extra precautions. This may be because the patient has a confirmed or suspected infection, or is at risk of developing an infection from other people. This could involve the patient being moved to a single room. Staff may need to wear aprons, gloves and sometimes a Face mask when they are caring for the patient.

It is rare that visitors are required to take extra precautions but this should be checked with the staff looking after you or the person you are visiting.

Laundering clothes

You may need to take special precautions when laundering clothes of patients with infections.

- **Normal (unsoiled) clothing:** Wear normal household gloves put clothing directly into an empty washing machine.
  - **Do not** mix hospital worn clothing with articles of household clothing.
  - Wash clothing at the highest temperature the clothes can safely tolerate. Fabric conditioner may be used as normal.
- **Soiled (dirty) clothing:** If garments are dirty with bodily fluids, i.e. blood, faeces or urine, as before, wearing normal household gloves, place the clothing directly into the washing machine.
  - If there is a pre-wash setting on the washing machine, wash the garments on this programme first. When the pre-wash is completed, wash the clothing again on a normal wash cycle at the highest temperature the fabric can tolerate. This will ensure any germs on the clothing are killed.
- **Hand hygiene:** Always wash hands thoroughly after handling used linen and after removal of gloves. This prevents germs contaminating your hands.
- **Drying clothing:** Warm tumble drying helps with the infection control process by helping to kill germs. Ensure the fabric can tolerate tumble drying.
- **Ironing:** Hot ironing helps with the infection control process by helping to kill germs. Ensure the fabric can tolerate hot ironing.

Contact us

If you think there is anything missing from this leaflet or if you have any suggestions that could help us reduce or prevent infections, please call us on 0118 322 6914 or e-mail us at infection.control@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

More infection control leaflets can be found on our website, visit https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/our-services/infection-control/

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Simon Wells, RBFT Infection Prevention & Control, November 2024. Next review due: November 2026