

The need for isolation

Introduction

Everyone has bacteria (germs) living in or on them. Most bacteria are harmless and some are helpful. However, a few bacteria have the potential to make you or other vulnerable people very ill. In the hospital, isolation or physical separation of one patient from others due to medical reasons is a common practice in order to keep the risk of spreading these harmful bacteria to a minimum.

The decision to isolate a patient is based on the risk assessment carried out by the clinical team when the patient is admitted and on a daily basis. Some patients may or may not need to be isolated for the duration of their stay in hospital. The decision depends on the level of precaution or protection needed by each patient. The patient and the family of isolated patients will be kept informed of the result of this risk assessment.

What are isolation precautions?

There are two kinds of isolation precautions:

Protective isolation is the separation of a patient who is ill or vulnerable to the risk of infection from common bacteria carried by people. Their susceptibility to infections will vary depending on their current health and their body's resistance.

Source isolation is used to prevent the transmission of infection/bacteria to others. This is used particularly for those infections where the main transmission route is airborne, for example Chicken Pox and respiratory cases of Tuberculosis.

Patients with *Clostridium difficile*, which is the major cause of antibiotic associated gastrointestinal infection, and patients with diarrhoea/vomiting will also be isolated.

Other patients may have additional risk factors, such as Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) and other multi-antibiotic resistant bacteria, or skin diseases such as psoriasis or eczema – which put them or others at risk, will also normally require isolation.

Patients are also isolated for other reasons, i.e.: privacy and end of life care.

What do the staff do?

- Staff will carry out regular assessments to evaluate the situation and ensure that the isolation facilities are being used appropriately.
- Staff will wash their hands before and after touching every patient.
- Staff will wear gloves and aprons when entering single rooms.

- Some isolation rooms have en-suite facilities (over half the side rooms in the Trust). Where en-suite facilities are unavailable, a dedicated commode or a designated ward toilet will be allocated for the duration of the patient's stay.
- The door of the single room will be kept closed. Isolation signage will be fixed to the outside of the room doors to let staff know what to do.
- Staff and visitors will report to the nurse in charge before entering the single room. The nurse will explain the reasons for the need for the precautions and the measures to be taken.

As a patient, how can you help?

- Limit your visitors to next of kin or primary care providers.
- Make sure visitors entering your room have read the sign on your door and wash their hands upon entering and exiting your room.
- Advise visitors to avoid contact with any of your dressings, urine bag, intravenous site and line, drainage tubes, feeding tubes etc. A sign will be posted on your door advising your visitors to speak to a member of nursing staff who will subsequently give them related infection control advice.

What is the best way to wash your hands?

- Wet hands with warm water.
- Dispense one measure of soap into palm.
- Work up lather by rubbing hands together for 15 seconds, covering all surfaces of the hands and fingers.
- Rinse hands thoroughly.
- Dry hands with paper towel.
- Discard towel in the waste bin provided.

Use alcohol hand rub

- On visibly clean hands only.
- Dispense one measure of alcohol rub onto the palm of one dry hand.
- Rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and fingers until dry.

Further information can be obtained from:

Your medical team or GP

Department of Health www.dh.gov.uk

Public Health England

0345 279 9879

More information is available from the Infection Control Team at the hospital.

Telephone 0118 322 6914