Help us fight infection
Please wash your hands it can save lives!

Together we can fight infection
Hospital infections can be introduced and spread by patients and visitors. This leaflet explains how you can help staff to reduce them and provide a clean and safe environment in which to care for patients.

By following the points in this leaflet, you can help us to prevent vulnerable individuals picking up infection and prevent the spread of infections.1

All staff receive Infection Control training. This includes practical sessions on hand washing. Staff must either wash their hands or use alcohol gel between care of every patient. Sometimes they get busy, so it is OK to remind staff to wash or gel their hands.

The Trust has invested money in housekeeping services to meet the National Standards for cleanliness2.

Staff adhere to a dress code. Clinical staff have adopted a “bare below the elbows” approach. Doctors may well do ward rounds in short sleeved shirts and not wear wristwatches to enable them to wash their hands properly3.

What can you do?
Make sure you are in good health before visiting.
If you have had diarrhoea and/or vomiting, you should be symptom free for at least 48 hours before your visit4.
If you have a heavy cold. Flu or a chest infection, do not visit5. This is particularly important if you are visiting Oncology, Haematology or Intensive Care Units. Wounds should not be left exposed and should be covered with a dressing for your protection.
Have you had contact with people with infections?
Some infectious conditions, for example chicken pox, shingles and mumps may be a problem to patients, especially babies, children and adults with a vulnerable immune system. If you have been in contact with somebody who has an infection it is best if you do not visit other patients. If unsure, please contact the ward staff or infection prevention and control team before you visit.

Hand Hygiene
Hand hygiene is the most effective way of stopping infections passing from person to person. In most instances the best way to protect patients and yourself is to use the alcohol gel provided when entering or leaving the ward or if assisting with the care of a patient. However, in the case of Clostridium difficile infection, or if there is viral diarrhoea and vomiting on the ward, or if you have been dealing with bodily fluids, we would ask you to wash your hands. Make sure you wash all surfaces of your hands.

Feel free to remind others if they appear to have forgotten.

How to wash your hands
You should wet your hands first, and then apply soap. Rub hands together thoroughly, paying particular attention to the backs of the hands, go up to the wrist area, in between fingers, finger nail beds and thumbs- these areas are commonly missed. Make sure you dry your hands thoroughly.

Patients being nursed in isolation
If a patient is being nursed with special precautions in a single room or in a bay, please check with staff before entering. The aim is to prevent the transfer of infection from the patient to other patients, staff and visitors. Always perform hand hygiene on leaving.

General Advice
• In order to assist ward staff in maintaining the highest standards of cleanliness only bring in essential items and try to keep patients’ personal belongings in the designated locker.

• Stick to visiting times and the numbers of visitors allowed.

• Please do not sit or lie on patients’ beds, use the chairs provided. Do not use the patient toilets.

• Never touch patients’ wounds, drips, tubes etc. If you do so accidently, please wash your hands immediately.
• If you are visiting more than one patient, perform hand hygiene in between them\(^7\). You should visit non-infectious patients first.

• Non perishable items of food can be brought in for patients. Other food must be prepared following good food hygiene principles. IT must be stored correctly in transit to the hospital and consumed immediately. If this cannot be guaranteed, the Infection Prevention and Control team does not recommend that this be given to patients.

• Please do not go into the ward kitchens unless you have been given specific permission from ward staff.

• Children should be discouraged from crawling on the floors and must be supervised at all times.

• Check what kind of gifts it is ok to bring in. Flowers are not allowed at the hospital as they inhibit the cleaning processes.

• Talk to the ward staff if you have any concerns about the cleanliness of the environment.

Further Information

For further information please contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team on 01305 253279.

Adapted from Royal College of Nursing, Information for Patients- MRSA and other healthcare associated infections- how you can stop the spread of infection and stay well (April 2005).