

Keeping your hands clean is the best way to prevent getting and spreading infection.

Infection Control and Isolation Precautions

At Northwestern Medicine, we care about the safety of our patients, visitors and staff. One aspect of safety is infection control. This includes careful hand cleaning by staff. It also may include isolation precautions and negative airflow rooms. This information explains infection control guidelines needed for patients and their visitors. If you have any questions, please talk with the nurse.

Clean Hands

Patient and Visitors

Germs cause disease. The way to lessen your risk of becoming sick by these germs is to keep your hands clean.

- Wash your hands for 15 to 30 seconds using soap and warm water. Cover all areas, including between the fingers, under the fingernails and around the nail beds. Dry your hands well with a paper towel.
- You can also use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that kills germs on your hands. Pump the dispenser one time onto your hands. Rub it all over your hands and fingers and allow it to air dry. No rinsing or patting dry is needed. As long as your hands are not visibly dirty, you may use this gel in place of handwashing.
- Clean your hands when you enter and leave a patient's room.

Isolation Precautions

At Northwestern Medicine, we have several types of isolation precautions. The type of precaution depends on the patient's condition or need. A printed sign is posted outside a patient's room to identify the type of precaution in effect.

The sign reminds visitors and staff about the methods required to prevent the spread of infection. Talk to the nurse before you enter a patient room or if you have any questions related to the guidelines.

Contact Precautions

- Some germs that cause illness are found on our hands and can be spread by touching the patient and items in the patient's room. Cleaning your hands prevents the spread of germs.

- You will notice healthcare workers wearing gloves and gowns when entering a patient's room. This is because the staff cares for more than 1 patient and it is important not to spread germs. As a visitor, you will not need to wear gloves and gowns.
- Clean your hands when you enter and leave the patient room.

Contact Plus Precautions

- Some germs live on surfaces for a long time. Therefore, extra cleaning may be needed.
- You will notice healthcare workers wearing gloves and gowns when entering a patient's room. This is because the staff cares for more than 1 patient, and it is important not to spread germs. As a visitor, you will need to wear gloves and gowns.
- Hospital cleaning staff will also use disinfectant to clean the patient room every day.
- Clean your hands every time you enter and leave the patient room.

Droplet Precautions

- Certain germs can be spread through respiratory secretions. When a person with these germs coughs or sneezes, the germs can travel short distances. When you see a Droplet Precautions sign posted, you should wear a mask if you are within 6 feet of the patient. Ask a caregiver to provide you with a mask.
- Clean your hands when you enter and leave the patient room.

Airborne Precautions

- Certain germs can be spread through the air. When you see an Airborne Precautions sign posted, you should not enter the patient's room unless you are wearing a mask.
- Clean your hands when you enter and leave the patient room.

Negative Airflow Rooms (Used with Airborne Precautions)

- Negative airflow rooms are specially equipped for patients who need a special ventilation system.
- Negative airflow patient rooms have 2 sets of doors that connect an ante-room to the patient's room. It is important to keep these doors completely shut at all times. An alarm will sound if the doors remain open.
- When visiting, be sure to enter and leave through the ante-room. Apply and dispose of any masks that are worn in the ante-room.
- Talk with the nurse to see what special steps you need to take before you enter the room.

Please help us control infection. Remember, having clean hands is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Department of Infection Control and Prevention