

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

Infection Control Guidelines and Isolation Precautions

For the continued safety of patients, physicians, staff and the community, Northwestern Medicine has safety measures in place to control infection. This includes careful hand cleaning. It also may include isolation precautions and negative airflow rooms. This brochure explains the infection control guidelines patients and visitors should follow. If you have any questions, please talk with a nurse.

Cleaning your hands

Patients and visitors

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

- Wash your hands for 20 to 30 seconds using soap and warm water. Cover all areas, including between your fingers, under your fingernails and around your 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 the gel 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 hand-washing.
- Visitors should clean their hands when entering or leaving a patient's room.

Isolation precautions

Several types of isolation precautions are used at Northwestern Medicine. The type of precaution depends on a patient's condition or need. A printed sign may be 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's room or if you have any questions about isolation precautions.

Contact precautions

- Some germs that cause illness are found on hands and can be spread by touching the patient and items in the patient's room. Cleaning your hands helps prevent the spread of germs.
- You will notice healthcare workers wearing gloves and gowns when entering the patient's room. This is because the staff cares for more than 1 patient, and it is important not to spread germs between patients' rooms. As a visitor, you will not need to wear gloves and gowns under contact precautions.
- Clean your hands every time you enter and leave the patient's 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 the patient's room. This is because the staff cares for more than 1 patient, and it is important not to spread germs between patients' rooms. As a visitor, you will need to wear gloves and gowns under contact plus precautions.
- Hospital cleaning staff will also use disinfectant to clean the patient's room every day.
- Clean your hands every time you enter and leave the patient's 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 if you do not already have one.
- Clean your hands every time you enter and leave the patient's 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 every time you enter and leave the patient's room.

Negative airflow rooms (used with airborne precautions)

- Negative airflow rooms are equipped with a special ventilation system.
- Negative airflow patient rooms have 2 sets of doors that connect an anteroom 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 anteroom. In the anteroom, apply and dispose of any required masks.
- Talk with the nurse to see what special steps you need to take before you enter the anteroom or patient's room.

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