

# Infection Prevention

Infections are caused by germs, such as bacteria or viruses. They cause common illnesses, such as colds and the flu, and serious diseases like whooping cough and tuberculosis. Most germs are spread by contact, often on unclean hands.

Having clean hands is the single most important way to prevent any infection. You may clean your hands by washing them with soap and water or by using an alcohol-based rub.

## Traditional Soap & Water:

- Soap and water must be used when your hands are visibly dirty, before handling food, when there is an infection that causes diarrhea, and after assisting others to the restroom or using it yourself.
- Wet your hands with warm water and liquid soap (if available) and then scrub for 10 to 15 seconds. Rinse well with warm water.
- Dry your hands with either paper towels or a **clean** towel.

## Alcohol-based hand rub:

- Alcohol-based hand rubs are the preferred method to clean your hands when your hands are not visibly soiled.
- They must contain at least **70 percent alcohol** to be effective.

## Other strategies for preventing infections:

- Instruct visitors to clean their hands before and after visiting you. Do not allow entry to a visitor who has a cold, an uncontrolled cough, a fever, or is not feeling well.
- If your caregiver is ill, it is best to relieve that person of caregiving duties until they are well again. If this is not possible, the caregiver must use good hand hygiene, wear gloves, and even wear a mask. Your care team can provide these materials if you need them.
- **Standard precautions:** These procedures are used by care teams and should also be used by caregivers.
  - Staff must wear gloves for contact with blood, body fluids, secretions, and excretions (except sweat), mucus membranes (eyes, nose, mouth, vagina, and rectum) and non-intact skin (wounds, scrapes, cuts, etc.), as well as for handling contaminated equipment or supplies. Family caregivers should do

the same. Throw gloves in the trash immediately after use and clean your hands.

- Gowns, masks, and eye protection must be worn by staff during procedures that may generate a splash of blood or body fluids.
- Contaminated equipment and supplies must be disposed of appropriately and disinfected prior to re-use.
- Surfaces, especially those frequently touched by the patient, should be routinely cleaned and disinfected. Products like Lysol® or bleach wipes work well for this.
- Handle used bedding, towels, and clothing minimally and keep them away from your body. Rolling them into a ball works well. Launder with detergent and warm water; bleach can be added if you choose.
- Do not recap, bend, break or hand manipulate used needles. Use safety needles as your first choice. If that is not possible, scoop the cap to cover the used needle without using your other hand. Dispose of used needles and other contaminated sharp objects in a puncture-resistant red sharps disposal container as soon as possible. To dispose of needles at home, place them into a strong plastic container.