

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 to prevent infections from spreading. This includes hand hygiene, and may also include isolation precautions and negative airflow requirements for rooms. This brochure explains the infection control guidelines you should follow. If you have any questions, please talk with your nurse.

Cleaning your hands

Patients and visitors

Germs cause disease. Keep your hands clean to lessen your risk of becoming sick from these germs.

- Wet your hands, and then wash for at least 20 seconds using soap and water. Cover all areas, including between your fingers, under your fingernails and around your nail beds. Rinse under clean water. Either air dry or dry your hands with a clean towel.
- If your hands are not visibly soiled, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to kill germs on your hands. Pump the dispenser 1 time onto your hands. Cover all surfaces of your hands. Let your hands air dry. Do not rinse or dry your hands with a towel.
- Visitors should clean their hands before and after contact with the patient or their environment.

Isolation precautions

Northwestern Medicine uses several types of isolation precautions. The type of precaution depends on a patient's condition or need. A sign may be posted outside a patient's room to identify the type of precaution in effect.

The sign reminds visitors and staff about what they need to do 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 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 before and after contact with the patient or patient's environment.

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. As a visitor, you will also need to wear gloves and gowns under contact plus precautions.
- Hospital cleaning staff will use a disinfectant to clean the patient's room every day.
- Clean your hands before and after contact with the patient or patient's environment.

Droplet precautions

- Certain germs can be spread through respiratory secretions (mucus in the lungs). When a person with these germs coughs or sneezes, the germs can travel short distances. When you see a Droplet Precautions sign posted, wear a mask if you are within 6 feet of the patient. Ask a caregiver to give you a mask if you do not already have one.
- Clean your hands before and after contact with the patient or patient's environment.

Airborne precautions

- Certain germs can be spread longer distances through the air. When you see an Airborne Precautions sign posted, you should not go into the patient's room unless you are wearing a mask.
- Clean your hands before and after contact with the patient or patient's environment.

Negative airflow rooms (used with airborne precautions)

- Negative airflow rooms are built with a special ventilation system.
- Negative airflow patient rooms have 2 sets of doors that connect a small entry room (anteroom) to the patient's room. It is important to keep these doors completely shut at all times. An alarm will go off if the doors stay open.
- When visiting, be sure to enter and leave through the anteroom. Use the anteroom to put masks on before you enter the patient room and throw them away when you leave.
- Talk with the nurse to see what special steps you need to take before you go into 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.