

Communicable Disease Information for Visitors and Volunteers in Health Care Facilities

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

What is a communicable disease?

A communicable disease is an illness caused by germs spread from one person to another.

How are germs spread?

Different types of germs can be spread in many different ways:

- when you breathe or inhale germs in the air;
- when you touch blood or other body fluids (e.g., through sexual contact, shared needle use, or by providing personal care);
- when you touch objects that have germs on them (e.g., telephone, computer);
- when people cough or sneeze in your face; or
- when you eat food or drink liquids that have not been properly prepared or stored, because they may contain germs. People preparing the food may also have germs that can be spread through food.

Why are patients/residents in health care facilities at risk for certain communicable diseases?

Patients or residents in health care facilities may not be able to fight infections as well as healthy people because of their age, illness or treatments. As well, they live in close contact with many other people, which can increase the number of germs they are exposed to.

What is a communicable disease outbreak?

A communicable disease outbreak occurs when more cases of a communicable disease, such as flu, diarrhea or scabies, are happening than is usual.

In a communicable disease outbreak, public health employees may work with the health care facility staff to stop the spread of germs.

This may be done by:

- limiting activities and visitors of patients/residents;
- stopping admissions or transfers of patients/residents;
- using protective clothing (such as gowns, masks and gloves); and
- taking specimens (e.g., nose or throat swabs) to identify germs causing the outbreak.

What can visitors and volunteers do to protect patients/residents and themselves?

1. **Wash your hands well with soap and water:**
 - before and after touching or giving care to patients/residents,
 - before providing food for patients/residents,
 - after touching or cleaning up any body fluids,
 - after using the toilet, and
 - after blowing/wiping your nose.

2. **Avoid visiting or working** with patients/residents **when you are ill** with colds, flu, diarrhea, skin infections or other infections such as chicken pox.
3. **Get a yearly flu shot** — those in contact with high-risk people can get a free flu shot. Contact your health care provider or local public health office for further information.
4. **Prepare food safely** if bringing it in for a patient/resident. Safe food preparation means food should be cooked thoroughly, stored in a refrigerator after cooking and the food should not sit at room temperature. **Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold!**

For more information contact:

