Preventing the Spread of Germs and Infections

Routine Practices and Additional Precautions
Preventing the Spread of Germs and Infections in Health Care

Health care providers work hard to prevent the spread of germs from one person to another. This is important because some germs can cause infections.

“Routine practices” are the minimum steps taken to prevent and control infection in the care of all patients at all times. These practices help to protect patients, clients, residents, visitors and health care providers from the spread of germs.

Routine practices include:

1. Hand hygiene (cleaning hands with alcohol sanitizer or washing with soap and water).
2. Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including gloves, gowns, masks and eye protection.
3. Safe handling and disposal of sharps (to prevent accidental needle sticks or cuts).
4. Safe handling of equipment or surfaces in the patient’s environment.
5. Respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette by coughing or sneezing into your elbow or using a tissue instead of your hand, and cleaning your hands immediately after.
Sometimes, additional precautions need to be used. These precautions are used in addition to the routine practices.

**What are “additional precautions”?**
Additional precautions are sometimes needed to keep germs from spreading from one patient to another. This means that gowns, gloves and masks or face shields may be needed when patients are on additional precautions. You may notice different signs in the hospital listing what extra steps are being taken and why.

**Additional precautions may include:**

**Contact precautions**
Contact precautions help limit the spread of germs (such as *C. diff*, MRSA, VRE and norovirus) through touching a patient or objects in the room.

Contact precautions may include:
- Health care providers will place a “Contact Precautions” sign outside your room.
- You may need to stay in a private room.
- Visitors must check with the nurse before visiting and before taking anything into or out of your room.
• Health care providers will clean their hands and wear gloves and a gown (PPE items) when giving you direct care.
• Visitors may be asked to wear gloves, a gown, a mask and eye protection.
• Health care providers will take off PPE items before leaving your room, place them in a garbage can in your room and clean their hands.
• Housekeeping staff will clean and disinfect your room. They may also wear gloves, a gown and a mask.

Droplet precautions
Droplet precautions help limit the spread of germs (such as pneumonia, influenza (flu), whooping cough and bacterial meningitis) through tiny droplets caused by coughing or sneezing. These droplets can travel up to 6 feet through the air before falling to the floor and on objects in the room.

Droplet precautions may include:
• Health care providers will place a “Droplet Precautions” sign outside your room.
• You may need to stay in a private room or the curtain will be kept drawn between you and any roommates.
• Visitors must check with the nurse before visiting and before taking anything into or out of your room.
• Health care providers will clean their hands and wear gloves, a gown, and a mask with eye protection (PPE items) when they are within 6 feet of you.
• Visitors may be asked to wear gloves, a gown, a mask and eye protection.
• Health care providers will take off PPE items before leaving your room, place them in a garbage can in your room and clean their hands.
• You will be asked to wear a mask when you leave your room for any medical testing. Your health care provider will help you with this.
• Housekeeping staff will clean and disinfect your room. They may also wear gloves, gown mask and eye protection.

**Airborne precautions**  
Airborne precautions help limit the spread of germs (such as tuberculosis, measles and chickenpox) through the air. These germs are not as heavy as the germs in droplets, so they can float in the air longer.  
Airborne precautions may include:
• Health care providers will place an “Airborne Precautions” sign outside your room.
• You will stay in a private room with the door closed. Your room may have “negative air”. This means that the air in the room is gently exhausted (removed) from the building. You may be transferred to another facility that can control the air flow better.

• Visitors must check with the nurse before visiting and before taking anything into or out of your room.

• Health care providers will clean their hands and may wear a mask when entering your room. They may also wear gloves and a gown (PPE items).

• Visitors may be asked to wear gloves, a gown, a mask and eye protection.

• Health care providers will take off PPE items before leaving your room, place them in a garbage can in your room and clean their hands.

• You will be asked to wear a mask when you leave your room for any medical testing. Your health care provider will help you with this.

• Housekeeping staff will clean and disinfect your room. They may also wear gloves, gown, mask and eye protection.

What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.
Notes:

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Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to http://library.novascotia.ca

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit https://811.novascotia.ca

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit http://ns.211.ca

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.