

Patient & Family Guide
2025

Infection Prevention and Control

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Infection Prevention and Control

Who is on the Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) team?

The IPAC team is a group of health care providers within Nova Scotia Health. We focus on preventing the spread of infection in Nova Scotia Health facilities.

All facilities work with 1 or more Infection Control Practitioners (ICP). Their role is to help other health care providers prevent and control infections by:

- Providing education to all health care providers and volunteers
- Promoting good hand hygiene and other infection prevention and control practices
- Keeping track of infections
- Managing outbreaks
- Providing guidance to health care teams on pandemic restrictions and procedures

Infection prevention and control is an important part of patient safety.

Infections while in the hospital

About 1 in 9 patients will get an infection while in the hospital. These infections may be mild or severe (very bad).

Common infections that patients in the hospital may develop include:

- › *C. diff* (linked to antibiotic use)
- › Pneumonia (lung infection)
- › Bladder infection
- › Wound infection

You may be at risk for these infections because of:

- › the treatments you get.
- › medications you take that weaken your ability to fight infection.
- › recent surgery.

Some infections may be prevented. Your chance of getting an infection may be higher depending on:

- › how sick you are when you come to the hospital.
- › how long you stay in the hospital.

What does my health care team do to help prevent infections?

Health care providers work hard to prevent infections.

- **Having clean hands is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.** Health care providers should clean their hands before they touch you. You may ask them if they have cleaned their hands.
- Health care providers should follow the proper steps if you are on Additional Precautions (see below).

You are a partner in your care. If you are concerned that a health care provider is not following the proper steps, please talk with them or the unit manager at your health care facility.

What are Additional Precautions?

Additional Precautions are sometimes needed to keep germs from spreading from one patient to another. This means that your health care providers, essential care partners, and visitors may need to wear gloves, gowns, masks, and eye protection (goggles, face shields). You may notice signs in the hospital listing the extra steps that are being taken and why.

What can I do to help prevent infections?

- Ask your primary health care provider if you need any vaccines to prevent infections like COVID-19, the flu (influenza), pneumonia, or shingles.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub, especially:
 - › before touching your face.
 - › before eating.
 - › after using the washroom.
- **Cough or sneeze into your arm, not your hand.** If you use a tissue, throw it away as soon as you use it, and then wash your hands. Use a new tissue each time you cough or sneeze.
- If you have a cough, you may be asked to wear a mask when:
 - › you are in close contact with health care providers.
 - › you are out of your room.
- Nursing staff will give you a mask, if needed. They can show you how to wear the mask, when to change it, and how to store it safely when you are not using it.

- **Keep your hands away from your face** (especially your eyes, nose, and mouth). Many illnesses are spread when people with germs on their hands touch their face and then touch other surfaces.
- Tell your nurse if you need a clean gown or linens, tissues, or other supplies.
- Keep your bed and the area around it free of clutter. This lets the staff who clean your room disinfect all surfaces in your area.
- Follow all directions from your health care providers before and after surgery, including instructions on cleaning your skin before surgery.

What can essential care partners and visitors do to help prevent infections?

- **Essential care partners and visitors should not visit you when they are sick.** They must follow any screening protocols (rules) in place at the time of their visit. Essential care partners and visitors should not approach the bedside of other patients in the room. Even a cold can be serious for a patient in the hospital.
- Consider a phone call if your loved ones cannot visit in person because they are sick.

- Children can spread infections. Leave them at home if they are sick or just getting over being sick.
- At times, there may be restrictions that limit visits from children. This may be due to illness in the community or a hospital outbreak.
- Limit the number of visitors in a room at one time. This lowers the number of people who can spread germs.
- Essential care partners and visitors should clean their hands:
 - › before they enter a patient's room.
 - › before handling food.
 - › before and after helping with patient care.
 - › at the end of each visit.
 - › before visiting another patient in the same room.
- **Do not sit on a patient's bed or use patient washrooms.**
- Follow any Additional Precautions procedures as told by staff.

What is an outbreak?

An outbreak means that there are more cases of illness at one time or in one place than usual.

Outbreaks can happen at any time of the year in health care facilities (like hospitals and nursing homes).

What causes an outbreak?

Outbreaks may be caused by different types of germs. They are usually caused by germs that affect the stomach and bowel. These germs can cause:

- › nausea
(upset stomach)
- › vomiting
(throwing up)
- › diarrhea (loose,
watery poop)
- › cough
- › headache
- › fever
- › aches and pains
- › runny nose

What happens during an outbreak?

The IPAC team will work with the health care team to try to control and stop the outbreak:

- Signs will be posted to let everyone know that an outbreak is happening.
- Depending on the type of outbreak, samples may be taken from patients and sent to the lab for testing.
- The health care team will check patients for any signs of illness.
- The health care team may wear gowns, gloves, and/or masks.
- Extra cleaning will be done in the area affected by the outbreak.
- Everyone will be reminded to keep their hands clean.
- Visitors, volunteers, and activities may be limited.
- Moving patients to and from the outbreak area may be limited.
- The IPAC team will keep the health care team, patients, and the public updated.

These measures will be kept in place until the outbreak has ended.

If you would like more information, please ask a member of your health care team.

**Nova Scotia Health takes infection prevention and control seriously.
It is an important part of safe patient care.**

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

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

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