

Preventing the Spread of Germs and Infections

Routine Practices and Additional Precautions

Aussi disponible en français :
*Prévenir la propagation des microbes
et infections : Pratiques de base et
précautions supplémentaires (FF85-1860)*



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Preventing the Spread of Germs and Infections

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 (least) steps taken to prevent and control infections while caring for all patients at all times. These practices help to protect patients, staff, essential care partners, and visitors from the spread of germs.

Routine practices include:

1. Hand hygiene (clean hands well with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub)
2. Use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves, gowns, masks, and eye protection (face shield, goggles)
3. Safe handling and disposal (throwing out) of needles and other sharp items to prevent accidental needle sticks or cuts
4. Cleaning and disinfection of equipment or surfaces in a patient's environment

5. Respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette (coughing or sneezing into your elbow or using a tissue instead of your hand, then cleaning your hands right after). If a patient has a new or worsening cough, they may be asked to wear a mask to help prevent the spread of germs.

Sometimes, we may need to use additional precautions. These precautions are used in addition to routine practices.

What are additional precautions?

Additional precautions are sometimes needed to keep germs from spreading from one patient to another. This means that PPE may be needed. You may notice signs in the hospital listing the extra steps that are being taken and why. Health care providers may also use the word 'isolation' when talking about additional precautions.

Additional precautions may include:

Contact precautions

Contact precautions help limit the spread of germs (like those that can cause vomiting [throwing up] and diarrhea [loose, watery poop]) 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.
- If you are not in a private room, a commode chair (portable toilet) will be placed at your bedside for your use only, and the curtain will be pulled between beds.
- Essential care partners and visitors must check with a 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 when giving you direct care.
- Essential care partners and visitors may be asked to wear gloves and a gown.
- Health care providers will take off PPE before leaving your room and place it in a garbage can in your room. They will wash their hands after removing PPE.

- 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 (like those that can cause COVID-19, pneumonia [lung infection], influenza [the flu], and whooping cough) through tiny droplets caused by coughing or sneezing. These droplets can travel up to 6 feet (2 meters) through the air before falling to the floor and/or 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 pulled between beds.
- Essential care partners and visitors must check with a 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, a mask, and eye protection when they are within 6 feet of you.
- Essential care partners and visitors may be asked to wear gloves, a gown, a mask, and eye protection.

- Health care providers will take off PPE before leaving your room and place it in a garbage can in your room. They will wash their hands after removing PPE.
- You will be asked to wear a mask when you leave your room. Your health care provider will help you with this.
- Housekeeping staff will clean and disinfect your room. They may also wear gloves, a gown, a mask, and eye protection.

Airborne precautions

Airborne precautions help limit the spread of germs (like those that can cause tuberculosis [TB], measles, and chickenpox) through the air. The particles carrying these germs are not as heavy as the particles 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. **It is very important that the door be closed** to help prevent the spread of airborne illnesses.

- Your room may have “negative air”. This means that the air in the room is gently exhausted (removed) from the building. **This is why your door must stay closed.** You may be transferred to another facility that can care for you in a negative air room.
- Essential care partners and visitors must check with a nurse before visiting and before taking anything into or out of your room.
- Health care providers will clean their hands before entering your room. They may also wear gloves, a gown, and an N95 mask (a special kind of mask).
- Essential care partners and visitors may be asked to wear gloves, a gown, a mask, and eye protection.
- Everyone will take off PPE before leaving your room, except for their mask. They will place the PPE in a garbage can in your room and then wash their hands. They can remove their mask once they are outside of your room and the door is closed.
- You will be asked to wear a mask when you leave your room. Your health care provider will help you with this.
- Housekeeping staff will clean and disinfect your room. They may also wear gloves, a gown, an N95 mask, and eye protection.

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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