

# Infection Control:

## *Information for Patients and Visitors*

### **How to reduce the spread of a contagious disease.**

*Minimally Invasive Surgery Hospital strives to be a safe, healthful place for patients, their visitors, and staff. One way to do this is to lessen the chance for the spread of infection.*

#### **What is an infection?**

An infection is an illness caused by “germs” such as bacteria and viruses. An infection is “contagious” (“infectious”) when it can be passed from person to person. The common cold is an example of a contagious disease.

#### **Can the spread of infection be prevented?**

Health care staff follows strict measures to prevent infections from spreading. But patients and their visitors have an important role, too. Here is how hospital staff, patients, and their visitors can work together to help control infections.

##### *Patient screening and placement*

Health care staff members usually ask each patient about certain infectious diseases. A patient who might carry a contagious disease may be placed in a private room.

##### *Patient transport and activity restrictions*

Special care is taken with certain patients whenever they need to move about the hospital. Patients who might have certain contagious illnesses will be asked not to take part in some activities in the hospital.

##### *Special precautions*

Depending on the patient’s illness, special precautions are taken by staff, patients, and their visitors. For example, visitors may need to wear protective “barriers,” like gloves or gowns. Staff also wears these items when caring for some patients.

#### **Part 1: Universal precautions**

Infections (like HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and hepatitis B) can be passed through contact with blood and other potentially infectious materials. “Universal precautions,” which include hand washing and wearing protective clothing, are good ways to prevent the spread of these and other serious infections. Even visitors must follow universal precautions.

##### *Why universal precautions are used*

Someone with HIV or another illness may not look sick. Because of this, universal precautions apply to all patients every time contact with blood or body fluids is possible. Universal precautions are used at all times with all patients. The fact that your caregivers use universal precautions does not necessarily mean that you have a contagious disease. But to protect you and themselves, they assume that every patient may have an infection.

### *How universal precautions work*

#### *Hand washing*

- Hand washing is the single most important way to prevent infection. Hands should be washed before and after visits with patients, after contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials, and after removing gloves or other protective barriers. The recommended time is 15 seconds of washing your hands with soap and water.
- An alternative method is an alcohol-based rub:
  - Apply about 1/2 teaspoon of the product to the palm of your hand.
  - Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands, until they're dry.
  - For grossly contaminated hands, soap and water is the best method for hand washing.

#### *Wearing protective barriers*

Health care workers and visitors must wear protective barriers, such as gloves, whenever contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials are likely. Disposable gowns, masks, eyewear, and other protective barriers help protect the face and skin.

#### *Safely handling contaminated items*

- Anyone handling contaminated items, such as waste, soiled linens, or patient care items, must avoid contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials.
- Visitors should ask staff how to handle and dispose of contaminated items.

## **Part 2: Isolation precautions -what they are**

Isolation precautions are used when a patient is known to have, or thought to have, a contagious disease. They are stopped either when a patient is found not to have an infectious disease, or when the patient is no longer infectious. These precautions are used with universal precautions. Patients on isolation precautions will have signs posted outside their hospital doors and on their hospital charts.

### ***Contact Precautions***

This applies to diseases spread by direct patient contact, contact with infectious material, or by contact with contaminated items in the patient's environment. (Examples are certain resistant bacterial infections and some kinds of diarrhea.)

#### *How it works*

Visitors should report to the nurses' station and speak with a nurse before entering the patient's room.

#### *The patient's room*

It will be private, or patients who have the same disease may share a room. If these arrangements are not possible, staff may take other precautions.

#### *Protective barriers*

Staff entering the patient's room must wear gloves and change them when they become soiled. Visitors may be asked to wear gloves and a disposable gown.

#### *Patient transportation*

Patients should leave their rooms as seldom as possible. If they must leave their rooms, they should avoid touching people or objects.

#### *Hand washing*

Everybody must wash their hands and avoid touching objects before leaving the room.

#### ***Droplet Precautions***

This is intended to prevent transmission of pathogens spread through close respiratory or mucous membrane contact. (i.e. respiratory secretions include *B. pertussis*, influenza virus, adenovirus, rhinovirus, *N. meningitidis*, and group A streptococcus (for the first 24 hours of antimicrobial therapy)).

#### *How it works*

Visitors should report to the nurses' station and speak with a nurse before entering the patient's room.

#### *The patient's room*

It will be private, or patients who have the same disease may share a room.

#### *Protective barriers*

- Staff entering the patient's room must wear gloves and surgical masks. Also, staff will wear protective eyewear if facial contact with respiratory secretions/mucus is likely, for example, if the patient is coughing or sneezing.
- Visitors entering the patient's room may be asked to wear a surgical mask. They should obey staff instructions if asked to use other protective barriers.

#### *Patient transportation*

Patients should leave their rooms as little as possible. If they must leave their rooms, patients should wear surgical masks.

#### *Hand washing*

- Hands must be washed before and after contact with the patient and after removing gloves.
- Be careful not to touch eyes or nose with gloves or with unwashed hands.

#### ***Airborne Precautions***

This applies to infectious agents that remain infectious over long distances when suspended in the air (e.g., rubeola virus [measles], varicella virus [chickenpox], *Mycobacterium. tuberculosis*, and possibly SARS-CoV).

#### *How it works*

Visitors should report to the nurses' station and speak with a nurse before entering the patient's room.

#### *The patient's room*

- It will be private, or patients who have the same disease may share a room.
- The room may have special ventilation.
- The door must stay closed.

### *Protective barriers*

Staff and visitors entering the patient's room must wear surgical masks.

If a patient is thought to have measles or chickenpox, visitors who are not certain they are immune (by previous infection or vaccination) should not enter the room.

### *Patient transportation*

Patients should leave their rooms as seldom as possible. If they must leave their rooms, they should wear surgical masks.

## **Part 3: Summary guidelines for visitor**

- Ask about special instructions. You may be asked not to bring personal items or flowers, which can harbor germs harmful to some patients.
- Follow instructions on signs. If the patient is on isolation (contact isolation, droplet isolation, or airborne precautions), report to the nurses' station for instructions before entering the patient's room.
- Use protective barriers. Wear whatever barriers the staff recommends. These may include gloves, disposable gowns, masks, and eyewear.
  - Here are some useful tips:
    - Put barriers on before entering the patient's room.
    - Put them on in this order: eyewear first, then mask, disposable gown, and gloves.
    - Take barriers off in this order: eyewear, disposable gown, gloves, mask.
    - When removing barriers, avoid touching their outer surfaces. They may be contaminated.
    - Dispose of barriers as you were instructed to by staff.
    - Wash your hands.
- Do not visit if you are ill. Avoid visiting if you know you have been exposed to a contagious illness or if you are sick. You could spread disease to others.
- Ask about rules for visiting. Depending on how the patient's disease is spread, your visit may be discouraged or limited. Ask the staff.
- Be understanding. These precautions may seem extreme, but remember, they help protect everyone.

### **Final notes**

- Feel free to ask questions. Staff will be happy to talk with you about infection control.
- Remember to wash your hands. Do this often, and correctly.

***Thank you for doing your part to fight the spread of infection at Minimally Invasive Surgery Hospital***