



What you can do to prevent infection.

Germs are everywhere. Most of the time, they don't make us sick. That's because our bodies have defenses like our skin and immune system that protect us. But sometimes, we can get infections from germs.

Infections occur most frequently in hospitals and other health care settings like clinics and doctors' offices where people have weakened immune systems. Healthy people, however, can also get infections even when they are not in the hospital.

Fortunately, there are simple things you can do at home, at the gym, and in the hospital, that can help prevent infection.

Here are a few easy measures you can take in your daily life to stay healthy.

..... **At Home**

- **Keep your hands clean.** Washing your hands regularly is the most powerful thing you can do to prevent infection. Make sure you always remember to wash after going to the bathroom, before you eat, or after taking out the trash. Since it's hard to always get to a sink, keep an alcohol-based hand sanitizer in your car or bag.
- **Cover your mouth and nose if you cough or sneeze.** Use a tissue or even the bend in your elbow to prevent spreading germs to others. Make sure to wash your hands afterwards.
- **Take care of cuts, scratches and wounds.** Your skin is your armor against harmful bacteria. Keep all cuts, scratches and wounds clean and protected with a clean, dry bandage. Don't "let it breathe" unless your doctor directs you differently. If cuts are not healing, see a doctor.
- **Keep your skin healthy.** If it starts getting dry or cracking, apply moisturizing cream to keep skin soft.
- **Use prescription antibiotics responsibly.** Be careful not to use prescription antibiotics too often. Doing this can actually make them less effective because it allows germs to build up resistance to medications. If you start taking antibiotics, be sure to take the full prescription. Stopping in the middle may allow the infection to return even stronger.

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In the Hospital

- **Handwashing.** The most powerful thing you and your health care team can do to prevent infections is also the most simple: everyone needs to wash their hands. Make sure you use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Also, know that all health care workers should wash their hands before and after touching you. In many hospitals, doctors, nurses and other health care workers are encouraging patients to ask them directly if they've washed their hands. That reminder helps them do their most important job—keeping you healthy.
- **Remind your visitors to wash their hands.** When someone comes to visit you in the hospital, be sure that they wash their hands before and after their visit. Explain to them that it's good for their health, and for yours.
- **Talk to your doctor before having surgery.** When you have surgery, your risk of getting an infection is higher. Before you have surgery, ask your doctor what you can do to protect yourself from infection. Be sure to ask if you should take antibiotics before or after your surgery.
- **Ask about catheters.** A catheter is a small tube that can be used to deliver fluids, medication or nutrition to your body. It can also be used to drain fluids like urine from your bladder. If your doctor or nurse says you need one, ask them what you can do to keep it from getting infected. Find out how often it should be changed and how long they expect to have it in. Check it often, and if it becomes uncomfortable, or if the bandage becomes wet or dirty, tell a health care worker immediately.

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In the Community

- **If you are sick, avoid close contact with others.** When you are sick, stay home from work or school, avoid public transportation and other places where there are crowds. Don't shake hands or touch others. That way other people won't get sick, and you'll get better faster.
- **Practice good hygiene at the gym.** Make sure to always clean weights, exercise mats and aerobic equipment with antibacterial wipes before and after you use them. Wear flip flops in the shower and steam room to prevent athlete's foot or other infections. Shower after you work out and make sure you always use a clean towel to dry yourself.
- **Keep exercise equipment clean.** If you or someone in your family plays ice hockey, football or some other sport that requires personal protective equipment, be sure they wipe down this equipment with antibacterial wipes after every use. It's important not to share personal equipment.

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Where to Learn More about Infection Prevention

The Joint Commission

http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp/speak_up_ic.htm

Prevent Infection

<http://www.preventinfection.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

<http://www.mass.gov/dph/>

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www.partnershipforhealthcare.org