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Tips for Being a Safe Patient

KEY POINTS

- Being a safe patient reduces your risk for illnesses while you receive care in places like a hospital.

- Patients, caregivers and healthcare providers all play a role in patient safety.

Why it's important

Did you know you can get infections in healthcare settings while being treated for something else?

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) can spread from person to person, through hands, medical equipment and more. HAIs are becoming more resistant to antibiotics and antifungals, making them difficult, and sometimes impossible, to treat.

Patients and their loved ones can help prevent HAIs, including those caused by antimicrobial-resistant germs. These tips describe how to be a safe patient and help reduce your risk of infections.

What you can do to be a safe patient

1. Tell your healthcare provider about any recent care.

2. Tell your healthcare provider if you think you have an infection or if your infection is getting worse.

3. Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed and tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effects, such as diarrhea.

4. Remind staff and visitors to keep their hands clean.

5. Allow people to clean your room.

Tips for patient safety

Tell healthcare providers about any recent care

Be sure to tell your provider if you:

- Were hospitalized in another facility.

- Received healthcare outside of the United States in the last six months.

- Ever had an antimicrobial-resistant infection.

Communicate with healthcare providers

- Speak up ⧉. Talk to your healthcare provider about any questions or worries. Ask what they're doing to protect you.

- Tell your healthcare provider if you think you have an infection, if an infection is not getting better, or if it's getting worse. Ask, "could this be sepsis?"

- If you have a urinary or central line catheter, ask daily when they can be removed. Leaving a catheter in place too long increases the chances you'll get an infection.

- Know the signs and symptoms of infection. Some skin infections appear as redness, pain or drainage at the IV catheter site or surgery site. Skin infections usually come with a fever, too.

- Insist that your healthcare providers never reuse a needle or syringe on more than one patient.

- Tell your healthcare provider if you have three or more diarrhea episodes in 24 hours, especially if you've been taking an antibiotic.

Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed

- Only take antibiotics when your provider thinks you need them.

- If prescribed antibiotics, ask if they're necessary.

- Follow all instructions you're given for taking them.

- Tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effects, such as diarrhea.

> **Keep Reading:**
> Antibiotic Prescribing and Use

Remind everyone to clean their hands

Cleaning hands often prevents the spread of germs, including resistant germs.

- People should clean their hands every time they enter your room, before and after they touch equipment, you, or your wound(s), and more. This includes your healthcare providers and visitors such as family and friends.

- Ask questions like, "Before you start the exam, would you mind cleaning your hands again?" and, "Can you clean your hands before changing my bandages?"

> **Keep Reading:**
> About Hand Hygiene for Healthcare Settings

Allow people to clean your room

Having a clean room while you're in the hospital or other healthcare setting is important. Don't say, "come back later." Even if it's an inconvenient time, let staff clean your room.

Know when and why healthcare staff wear gowns and gloves

- Healthcare workers may wear gowns and gloves to prevent spreading germs with their hands and clothes.

- Staff should tie their gown at the neck and back, so it covers their front and shoulders.

Be mindful of antimicrobial-resistant germs

Identifying and treating resistant germs early helps prevent their spread.

- You can carry a resistant germ even if you don't have symptoms.

- Allow healthcare personnel to test you for an antimicrobial-resistant germ if they ask. Testing helps personnel pick the right antibiotic or antifungal treatment.

- Ask your provider what they and the facility will do to protect you and your family from an antimicrobial-resistant infection.

> **Keep Reading:**
> About Antimicrobial Resistance

Stay safe before and after surgery

- Take steps, such as telling your healthcare provider about other medical problems you may have and not shaving near where you will have surgery, to avoid things like surgical site infections (SSIs).

What CDC is doing

The Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion (DHQP) protects patients and healthcare personnel, and promotes safety, quality and value in national and international healthcare delivery systems. DHQP also tracks HAIs and antimicrobial resistance through its Emerging Infections Program, National Healthcare Safety Network, the Antimicrobial Resistance Laboratory Network and the Global Antimicrobial Resistance Laboratory and Response Network. DHQP works closely with health departments and healthcare partners to prevent HAIs and stop the spread of resistant germs.

If you are interested in partnering with CDC to help improve patient safety in healthcare settings in the United States, please use this form to tell us a little more about yourself or your organization.

Your Name: (optional)

Organization Name: (optional)

Email Address: *

Necessary for reply.

Areas of Interest: (optional)

Comments and/or Questions: (optional)

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SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (NCEZID)