Healthcare-associated infections in residential aged care

What residents and visitors can do to prevent and limit infection
What are healthcare-associated infections?

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) are infections that occur as a result of healthcare interventions and are caused by microorganisms — such as bacteria and viruses.

Infections can happen when you are being treated in a hospital or clinic. They can also happen in a nursing home or other residential aged care home.

The risk of becoming infected depends on your health, whether you have had surgery, and medicines that you take (including some antibiotics). Older people tend to be more vulnerable to infection.
How can you protect yourself and others against HAIs?

The most important thing you can do is perform hand hygiene.

Hand hygiene can be performed using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

It is important that you, your care worker and visitors performs hand hygiene at the right moments.

Hand Hygiene should be performed when your hands look dirty and before:

- touching or eating food or putting anything in your mouth
- touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- touching a dressing.

Also perform hand hygiene after:

- going to the bathroom/toilet
- sneezing, coughing or disposing of tissues
- touching a dressing
- handling dirty clothes or linen.

Everyone — health and personal care workers, residents and visitors — has a role in preventing and controlling healthcare-associated infections.
Prevent the spread of disease by performing hand hygiene

**HAND RUB**

1. Apply alcohol-based hand rub to hands
2. Rub hands together

**HAND WASH**

1. Wet hands with running water
2. Apply soap to hands
4. Rinse hands with water
5. Dry hands thoroughly
How to perform hand hygiene:

1. Wet hands thoroughly.
2. Apply soap to hands.
3. Lather soap and rub hands together thoroughly.
4. Once dry, your hands are clean.
Other ways to prevent the spread of HAIs in residential aged care homes include:

- maintaining a clean environment
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and then perform hand hygiene
- wearing personal protective equipment such as gloves, gowns, masks and goggles
- putting people who have an infectious illness in a room on their own
- managing medical devices (IV lines, catheters) properly
- correct handling of linen, food and waste.

If you are a visitor

- Don’t visit an aged care home if you feel unwell or have a cold, or have been vomiting or have diarrhoea. Wait until you feel better.
- Perform hand hygiene before visiting and before going home.
- Check with a staff member if you are unsure of your or other visitors’ health status.
- Be careful not to touch dressings, drips or other equipment.
Talk to your care worker

- Don’t be afraid to ask your care workers if they have performed hand hygiene.
- Let your care worker know if your room or equipment hasn’t been cleaned properly.
- Tell your care worker straight away if you feel unwell.
- Tell your care worker if the area around the insertion site where drips, lines, tubes or drains become red, swollen or painful.
- If you have a dressing, tell your care worker promptly if the dressing becomes loose or wet.

More information

Don’t hesitate to ask your doctor or care worker for more information.

Consumer guides are also available on specific healthcare associated infections such as MRSA, VRE and C. difficile
http://www.nhmrc.gov.au
References


Hand Hygiene Australia (2008)
Health Care Associated Infections
http://www.hha.org.au/ForConsumers/FactSheets.aspx#HCAI