

PREVENTING HEALTH CARE-ASSOCIATED INFECTIONS

Did you know your hospital stay could put you at risk? Health care-associated infections (HAIs) are infections that patients catch while receiving treatment in a health care facility and affect 1.7 million patients in the U.S. each year. While extremely preventable, they are currently the most common complication of hospital care. These infections are difficult to treat with antibiotics and can be deadly, killing an estimated 99,000 people each year.

HAIs are caused by the spread of bacteria during routine hospital procedures and during contact with unclean surfaces. Many hospital patients have a weakened immune system due to sickness and recovery, transforming bacteria that a healthy person can fight off into a deadly threat. Everyone is at risk to contract an HAI, especially the very ill, those recovering from surgery, older patients, and those with chronic medical problems. Getting an HAI means being sicker, a longer hospital stay, and a larger hospital bill.

You can take several steps to help keep yourself safe and healthy during a hospital stay. Because the bacteria associated with HAIs are difficult to treat with antibiotics, prevention is the best medicine. Hospitals are required to have programs in place to avoid the spread of HAIs, but patients also play an important role in the prevention and elimination of these unnecessary infections. The next time you or a loved one are in the hospital keep the following in mind to reduce your chances of developing an HAI:

- » Wash your hands: Wash your hands and ask your family members to wash theirs as well. It seems simple enough but this step alone was a key factor in the success of a Michigan hospital's initiative to eliminate infections.
- » Questions are the answer: Asking your nurse, doctor and hospital staff questions can help ensure everyone is paying attention and on the same page. Good questions to start with are "Have you washed your hands?" and "How does your hospital prevent HAIs?"
- » Speak up: Don't be afraid to speak up if you notice something does not seem right. This could be anything from dirty bandages to a visitor's potential illness. If you are concerned then there is probably good reason to be, so let someone know about it.

These steps serve as a reminder to both patients and hospital staff to eliminate HAIs. Taking the time to familiarize yourself with potential risks and precautionary practices can help you during your next hospital stay.

For more information visit: <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/cc/cc050410.htm>.

Choosing where you receive care is an important decision, but all care is not the same. Cost and quality can vary and **QualityCounts™** can help you find information on the quality, safety and cost for providers that participate with The Alliance. Visit <http://www.the-alliance.org/qualitycounts.aspx> today.