

Hospital Infections a Risk?

Infections contracted in hospitals are the fourth largest killer in America. Every year, two million patients contract infections in hospitals, and an estimated 103,000 die as a result – as many deaths as from AIDS, breast cancer, and car crashes combined.

Patients and their families have a role in obtaining safe hospital care. Here are some steps you can take to improve a hospital stay – yours or your loved one's.



Keep cuts clean and covered with sterile, dry bandages until the wound has closed.

BEFORE YOU CHECK IN

If your hospitalization is prescheduled:

- **Ask to be tested for MRSA** (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), a potent strain of bacteria that resists many antibiotics. It generally won't make you sick unless it gets inside your body, usually via a catheter, breathing device, or a break in the skin. If you test positive for MRSA, precautions can be taken.
- **Ask the surgeon** about the infection rate for each of the procedures they'll perform. Choose a surgeon with a low infection rate.
- **Debug yourself.** Begin showering daily with chlorhexidine soap five days before a scheduled surgical procedure to help remove bacteria living on the skin.
- **No tobacco.** Smoking hampers circulation, impeding infection-fighting blood cells. Patients who smoke are three times as likely as nonsmokers to become infected at the site of their surgery, so cut back or quit.

IN THE HOSPITAL

- **Clean hands.** Ask the staff to clean their hands before touching you. If you're reluctant, ask a family member or friend to make the request. Keep alcohol-based hand cleaner nearby.
- **Gloves aren't enough.** If caregivers put on gloves without cleaning their hands first, or pull them on and touch the bedrail or privacy curtain, the gloves are contaminated.
- **Keep germs at bay.** Wash your own hands often, avoid putting them to your mouth, and don't let your food or utensils touch furniture or bedding.
- **No Razors.** If body hair must be removed, request clippers to prevent razor nicks.
- **Limit tubes.** If you must have a catheter, ask your doctor and nurse frequently, "Do I still need this?"



Be Informed About Your Care

Information is available to help you compare surgical results and costs, and let you know what to expect with your procedures.

- **Aetna Members** – log in at www.aetna.com, click Hospital Compare or Cost of Care.
- **All U.S.** - LeapFrog at www.leapfroggroup.org/cp?form=cp_start&p=1