

## What are HAIs?

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) are infections that patients get while receiving medical treatment at a health care facility. They can occur in all settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, surgery centers, dialysis centers, outpatient clinics or even in your home.

HAIs are caused by microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi. They can be spread by health care staff, infected patients, contaminated medical equipment, visitors, or an unclean environment. HAIs are associated with a variety of causes, especially the use of medical devices (ex. catheters and ventilators), surgery, injections, and overuse or improper use of antibiotics.

## Maintain a Clean Environment

Keep the area and items around you clean and disinfected. This is especially important for “high touch” areas, including:

- Door knobs and handles
- Call buttons
- Phones
- Chair arms
- Over-bed tables
- Sinks and faucets
- Medical equipment, such as IV poles, pumps, wheelchairs, whole blood glucose testing devices, etc.

## YOU have a role in infection prevention!

**Everyone needs to know their role in identifying risks and taking steps to prevent infections.**

- Be active in your care. Speak up if you have concerns. Ask if you have questions!
- Perform hand hygiene. Ask health care workers and visitors to wash their hands.
- Know the signs of infection.
- Clean and disinfect your surroundings.
- Discuss antibiotic use.
- Avoid unnecessary catheter use.
- Talk to your health care provider about getting vaccinated against the flu and other infections to avoid complications!



For more information, visit the  
North Dakota Department of Health  
website at:  
[www.ndhealth.gov/disease/hai/](http://www.ndhealth.gov/disease/hai/)

## Prevention tips for Healthcare-associated Infections (HAIs)



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## Know the Signs of Infection

Being informed, alert and taking action in situations that can cause an infection will help keep you safe.

Be aware of your own risks for infection and know the signs.

Tell your health care team about changes or problems with your health.

Signs of infection:

- Redness or warmth around a wound
- Swelling or yellow/green/gray pus from a wound
- Fever and chills
- Nausea
- Watery diarrhea
- New feelings of confusion or agitation
- Joint aches
- Rapid heart rate

In certain situations, caregivers and family members may need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, masks, gowns and goggles, to prevent the spread of infection.



## Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is the primary way to prevent HAIs for patients, residents and health care workers.

Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer usually works well, but certain germs, like *Clostridium difficile*, are more effectively eliminated with soap and water.

To prevent the spread of infection, you and your visitors should perform hand hygiene:

- Before eating
- After using the bathroom
- After touching another person or yourself
- After contact with “high touch” areas
- After sneezing or coughing

Your healthcare worker should perform hand hygiene:

- Before touching you
- Before providing care to you
- After touching blood or bodily fluids
- After touching you
- After completing a procedure
- After touching your surroundings

### Hand Washing Procedure:

1. Wet hands with water.
2. Apply soap to hand surfaces.
3. Rub hands together using friction while rubbing palms together and interlocking fingers.
4. Rinse hands with water.
5. Dry hands thoroughly with a single use towel. Use a towel to turn off the faucet.



## Urinary Catheter Use

A urinary catheter is a tube that is inserted into the bladder to drain urine. Urinary catheters can be very beneficial following surgery if an individual cannot urinate, or if urine remains in the bladder after urination. Urinary catheters should never be used as a convenience.

A urinary tract infection is an infection in the urinary system, including the bladder and kidneys. With a catheter in place, germs can travel along the catheter to the bladder and kidneys and cause infection, which is called a catheter-associated urinary tract infection.

Always ask if a catheter is necessary, and if placed, ask to have it removed as soon as possible.

Remember to perform hand hygiene when handling or caring for your catheter.

## Antibiotic Use

Antibiotics are given to treat certain bacterial infections or to prevent bacterial infections from developing or becoming worse. When you take an antibiotic, it may destroy the “bad” bacteria AND the “good” bacteria that are beneficial to human health. When this happens, you are less able to fight off infections.

Discuss antibiotic use with your doctor, and remember, antibiotics do not work for viruses.

