

How to Avoid Hospital Infections



GET TESTED BEFORE YOU GO

MRSA infections in hospitals are on an alarming rise. MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*—a deadly organism that kills an estimated 19,000 patients in hospitals every year. A quick \$20 test (nasal swab) is available to alert you to whether you're carrying the germ. If so, your doctor and hospital can take special precautions to protect you from a life-threatening infection.



CLEAN STETHOSCOPES HELP

Before a nurse or doctor uses a stethoscope on you, ask that it be wiped with alcohol. Stethoscopes can be contaminated with MRSA and other dangerous bacteria that can live on its surface for hours or days. Stethoscopes often get forgotten in the cleaning procedures between patients so speak up.



ASK ABOUT INFECTION RATES

Ask your doctor about the rate of infection for the procedure you're having. While it can be difficult to get data to compare one doctor or hospital's rate against another, you can at least make an informed judgement about the risk you might be facing and take extra precautions.



PLAY DETECTIVE

Watch and learn about the hospital's sanitation procedures and environment. Is hand washing continually being done? Do hospital personnel have checklists of disinfecting procedures they are following? Do you see dirty areas or lots of clutter? If you spot unsanitary procedures or conditions don't be embarrassed to ask for some clean-up.



USE CHLORHEXIDINE SOAP

If you're having elective surgery, three to five days before your operation, bathe or shower using chlorhexidine soap - available at most drugstores without a prescription for around \$10. This will help get rid of any dangerous bacteria you may be carrying on your own skin - which can be harmless until it has the opportunity to enter an incision or wound.



ASK ABOUT ANTIBIOTICS

For many surgeries, your doctor may want you to take an antibiotic shortly before your operation, to prevent an infection. Those who don't get an antibiotic within a 1-2 hour timeframe before surgery have an increased chance of infection at the site of the surgery. Administering the medicine can often get lost in the pre-op shuffle, so if you don't receive one, ask your doctor or nurse before you go under anesthesia.



AVOID URINARY CATHETERS

An uncomfortable topic to be sure, but the most common hospital infection is a urinary tract infection that is often caused or worsened by a urinary catheter - through which infections can enter your body. The risk of infection goes up significantly if you have a catheter for more than six days. Ask your doctor or nurse if it's absolutely necessary and if it is, ask them to remove it as quickly as possible.



SOUND THE ALARM

If you feel you have the signs of an infection (fever, symptoms unrelated to your condition, skin rashes or sores, etc.) alert your doctor or nurse immediately. Infections can quickly get worse - especially if your immune system is weakened from recent surgery or an illness. The faster you get treatment, the better chance you have of fighting off the infection.