This factsheet provides information about being cared for in isolation during a stay in hospital. We hope it will answer some of the questions you are likely to have. If you would like more information or have any concerns, your healthcare team will be pleased to advise you further.

What is isolation?
Isolation in a hospital setting is a precaution taken to prevent the spread of infection. Infections can spread easily in hospitals, putting patients, visitors and staff at risk. Special care must be taken to prevent infections with a particular risk of spreading from being passed on to others (for example, infectious diarrhoea, MRSA, tuberculosis (TB) and chickenpox). Therefore, if you are infected you may need to be cared for separately from other patients. Sometimes this will be in a separate room, or it may be possible to care for you on the ward with additional precautions. During this time good hand hygiene is very important. Isolation will be continued until there is no longer a risk of the infection being spread to others.

Why do I need to be isolated?
• You may have, or are suspected to have, an infection that could be passed on to other patients or staff.
• You may need protecting from picking up an infection because you have a weakened immune system or are taking certain drugs. This is called ‘protective isolation’.

What you can expect from us during your isolation
• You will be given clear information about why you are being cared for in isolation.
• We will place an ‘Isolation care’ sign on your door.
• Hospital staff will clean their hands on entering and leaving the room.
• Protective clothing:
  - Staff will wear protective clothing, for example gloves and an apron, in order to reduce the risk of passing the infection/germ to other patients that they are caring for. The type of clothing worn will depend upon the type of care being carried out and how the infection is spread. If the infection is likely to be spread by breathing in the germs that are causing it, staff will wear masks.
  - It is very unlikely that your visitors will need to wear protective clothing. If this is required, nursing staff will tell you.
• We will try to provide you with a single room with en-suite toilet facilities. However, this isn’t always possible, so a dedicated commode may be provided in your room or a dedicated toilet allocated to you on the main ward.
• Being in isolation will not affect your care. Ward staff will advise other departments of any precautions required should you need to visit them (to go for an x-ray, for example). The infection prevention team is available if further advice is needed.
• We will adapt our care to your personal circumstances and you may have special assessments from other teams, such as physiotherapy or occupational therapy, if required.
• We have a number of information leaflets on specific infections such as MRSA, diarrhoea and vomiting and Clostridium difficile (C. diff). If you would like to read these, please ask a member of staff.
What we ask from you during isolation

- You should remain in your room unless instructed otherwise.
- The door to your room should be kept closed to help control the spread of infection. If you have any concerns about this, please talk to your nursing staff.
- Don’t visit other patients on the ward or in the next single room.
- You must not share personal items, food or equipment with other patients.
- Ensure that you clean your hands before eating and after using the toilet. If you are unable to reach the sink, please ask a member of nursing staff to provide hand cleaning materials/wipes.
- If you have a wound, do not take the dressing off to show the wound to visitors.
- Keep your personal items to a minimum, so that the table and locker tops are uncluttered and easy to keep clean.
- Please ask your visitors not to bring in any food cooked at home or from outside food suppliers (such as takeaway restaurants). Pre-packaged snacks such as biscuits and crisps are acceptable.

Important information for visitors

We ask that your visitors follow the steps below to help prevent the spread of infection:

- A maximum of two visitors are allowed at one time.
- Do not visit the hospital at all if you have recently been unwell or have had diarrhoea and vomiting within the previous 48 hours.
- Clean your hands on entering and leaving the isolation room.
- Do not bring young children to visit as they are particularly vulnerable to infection.
- Use the chairs provided. Please do not sit on the bed.
- Avoid bringing food and drinks to consume at the bedside.
- Do not visit other patients within the hospital when you are visiting a person in isolation.

You do not usually have to wear gloves or aprons unless providing personal care to your relative.

The nursing staff will be able to advise you further.

Tips for coping with a period of isolation

Occasionally patients in isolation experience feelings of anxiety and/or loneliness.

The steps below can help to minimise these feelings:

- If you have questions, talk to your healthcare team about why you are in isolation and why precautions are necessary. Remember that isolation is intended to keep you safe and healthy. Asking questions before and during isolation can reduce some of the anxiety you may experience during this time.
- Having some of your personal objects with you can help reduce feelings of separation and boredom. You may find it helps to have your favourite books and music available. It can also be helpful to arrange telephone calls, video chats or visits from loved ones.
- Keep several activities on hand to occupy you. You may tire of doing the same thing every day, so make sure you have a variety of games, films, books, magazines and arts and crafts to help pass the time.
- Try to maintain a daily routine as much as possible. Open your blinds during the day and close them at night if possible. Be aware that sleeping during the day to cope with boredom can lead to trouble sleeping at night.
- If you become aware of major changes in your mood or behaviour, for example you notice yourself feeling increasingly sad or irritable, discuss these concerns with your healthcare team.

Not everyone has negative feelings about isolation precautions. Some patients enjoy the extra privacy a single room offers, while others appreciate not being disturbed by other patients.

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How long will isolation last for?
This will depend on the reason for your isolation. It may be anything from a few days to the whole length of your stay. When isolation is no longer necessary you will be moved to the open ward or discharged. The room or bed space will be cleaned before it is used by another patient.

Discharge from hospital or transfer to another hospital
Usually there will be no delay if you are returning to your own home. Having been in isolation should not usually stop you going into a nursing or residential home. Although you may have a single room, you should be able to mix freely with most other residents. If you need to be transferred to another hospital, you may experience a slight delay as the hospital may want to place you in a single room and this could take time to organise.

What happens when I get home?
You may be discharged from isolation to your home. This is because the infection does not have the same risk in a non-hospital setting and it’s not necessary to take the same precautions at home. However, if a relative or carer is helping you with washing or dressing a wound, it’s important that they wash their hands before and afterwards. Bed linen and clothes can usually be washed as normal in a domestic washing machine. If you need to continue taking special care at home, you will be told by the hospital staff before you leave.

Further information
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If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.