Isolation

This factsheet is about your care in isolation during your stay in hospital. We hope it will answer some of the questions you may have. If you would like more information or have any concerns, please ask your healthcare team.

What is isolation?

Isolation is a precaution we take to prevent the spread of infection in hospital.

Infections can spread easily in hospitals, putting patients, visitors and staff at risk. We have to take special care to prevent infections with a particular risk of spreading from being passed on to others (for example, infectious diarrhoea, MRSA, tuberculosis (TB) and chickenpox).

If you have an infection, we may need to care for you separately from other patients. Sometimes this will be in a separate room, or sometimes on the ward with additional precautions. During this time good hand hygiene is very important.

You will need to stay in isolation 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 be suspected to have, an infection that could be passed on to other patients or staff.
- You may need to be protected from picking up an infection because you have a weakened immune system or are taking certain medicines. This is called ‘protective isolation’.

What you can expect from us during your isolation

- We will give you clear information about why you are being cared for in isolation.
- We will place an ‘Isolation care’ sign on your door to communicate the isolation requirements, and prevent unnecessary visitors and non-essential staff coming in.
- Staff will clean their hands on entering and leaving the room.
- Staff will wear protective clothing (for example, gloves and an apron) to reduce the risk of passing the infection/germ to other patients that they are caring for. The type of clothing they wear will depend on 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. A nurse will tell you if this is necessary.
- We will try to provide you with a single room with en-suite toilet facilities. However, this is not always possible, so we may provide a dedicated commode in your room or allocate a dedicated toilet to you on the main ward.

- Being in isolation will not affect your care. Ward staff will tell other departments if they need to take any precautions if you need to visit them (to go for an x-ray, for example). The infection prevention team is available to give further advice.
- We will adapt our care to your personal circumstances. You may have special assessments from other teams, such as physiotherapy or occupational therapy.
- We have several information leaflets on specific infections, such as MRSA, gastroenteritis and clostridioides difficile (C. diff). If you would like to read these, please ask a member of staff.

What we ask from you during isolation

- Stay in your room unless instructed otherwise.
- Keep the door to your room closed to help control the spread of infection. If you have any concerns about this, please talk to your nursing staff.
- Do not visit other patients on the ward or in the next single room.
- Do not share personal items, food or equipment with other patients.
- 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.

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.
- Do not bring food and drinks to consume at the bedside.
- Do not visit other patients in the hospital when you are visiting a person in isolation.

You do not usually have to wear gloves or aprons unless you are 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 people 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 people enjoy the extra privacy a single room offers or appreciate not being disturbed by other patients.

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, we will move you to the open ward or discharge you.

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?

We may discharge you 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. You can usually wash bed linen and clothes as normal in a domestic washing machine. If you need to continue taking special care at home, we will explain this before you leave.

Contact us

Infection prevention team
Telephone: **023 8120 4672**

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