

Keeping Loved Ones Safe From Infection In Healthcare Facilities: APIC Says 'Be A Good Visitor'

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Visitors to a healthcare facility play an important role in guarding patient safety. To commemorate Patient Safety Awareness Week (March 8-14), the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) offers simple tips to be a good visitor. Learn more at <http://www.preventinfection.org>.

Sanitize hands before and after visiting

The soap and hand sanitizer in patient rooms are for everyone - wash or sanitize your hands when entering and leaving the room of the person you are visiting to avoid bringing in and carrying out germs. Insist that healthcare providers do the same before caring for your loved one. Clean your hands after sneezing, coughing, touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, after using the restroom and before and after eating and drinking. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your sleeve, and do not sit on patient beds or handle their equipment. Read and follow any instructions posted outside the patient's room.

Stay home if you are sick

Do not visit the hospital if you are sick or have had any ill symptoms within the last three days including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever (or feeling feverish), uncontrolled cough or rash.

Check first before you bring food, send flowers or take the kids

While flowers, young visitors and home-baked goodies spread cheer, they may not be allowed, so check with the nurse first. Most hospitals prohibit flowers in intensive care units. If you change the water in a vase of flowers, be sure to wash your hands afterward. Bringing food is risky because the patient may be on a special diet or the food could spoil and make the patient sick. Likewise, check with the healthcare facility about the rules for children visiting. If you bring youngsters, don't let them play on the floor or bed and have them wash their hands as they enter and leave the room. Make sure the child is free from symptoms of infection (e.g., runny nose, sore throat, rash, cough, etc.)

Special precautions

If the person you are visiting is on "Isolation Precautions," talk to the nurse before entering the room to find out what steps you will have to take, such as wearing a mask or other protective clothing. Also ask for any educational materials that may be available.

Don't contribute to the clutter

Limit the patient's personal items. Less clutter eases the critical job of cleaning hospital rooms. Keep patient items off the floor and away from waste containers.

Visiting more than one

If you are visiting multiple patients (for instance, if you are a pastor), sanitize your hands before and after seeing each patient. Do not share the communion cup and lay the wafer on a paper towel (not directly on the patient's table.) Visit the person in isolation last and follow the precautions specified.

Back at home

Keep the patient healthy back at home. Follow discharge instructions and eliminate germs from the patient's environment by using disinfectants, such as sprays and wipes, to clean hard surfaces often.

Ask for special instructions if the patient had a drug-resistant infection such as MRSA or C. difficile.

APIC's mission is to improve health and patient safety by reducing risks of infection and other adverse outcomes. The association's 12,000 members direct infection prevention programs that save lives and improve the bottom line for hospitals and other healthcare facilities around the globe. APIC advances its mission through education, research, collaboration, practice guidance, public policy and credentialing. Visit APIC online at <http://www.apic.org>

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