



Healthy Visits to Patients in Healthcare Facilities

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Much of human life begins and ends in healthcare facilities. These institutions are also places of treatment, healing and recovery. It is natural, therefore, that visitors to patients in healthcare facilities can be so focused on the emotional aspects of connecting with their friends and loved ones that they forget to take precautions to avoid spreading infection.



The following tips are meant to promote healthy visits to patients in healthcare facilities.

Infection Prevention Starts with Your Hands

According to the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), hand washing is the single most important means of preventing infections. Wash your hands as you enter the patient's room, frequently while in the room, before and after touching the patient or the patient's immediate environment, and just before leaving the room. Use hand sanitizer stations if warm water and soap are unavailable. It is perfectly acceptable to remind family, friends and healthcare providers, including doctors, nurses, certified nursing assistants and physical therapists, to wash their hands upon entering a patient's room. The CDC provides [detailed directions](#) for proper hand washing.

The [Heywood Hospital website](#) also notes that your skin is an important barrier to infection, so use moisturizers, especially in winter, to prevent cracking. Keep all cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage. Never touch patient wounds or catheters (tubes) unless instructed by the staff.

Stay Home if You're Sick

Don't visit a healthcare setting if you have a cough, cold, fever or diarrhea. A phone call, text, email or written note can communicate your good wishes without the risk of spreading unwanted germs. The [MedlinePlus website](#) also recommends you stay home if you were exposed to chickenpox, the flu or any other infections.

Stay up to Date with Your Immunizations

The seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for everyone six months old and older. The flu shot is especially important for people who are at high risk for serious complications from the flu, including

children younger than two, adults 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities and people with weakened immune systems. Your doctor can advise you about obtaining other vaccines, such as a pneumonia vaccine.

Observe Good Visitor Hygiene

Don't sit on the patient's bed or put your feet on the bed. Don't share the patient's food or drinks. Use toilets meant for visitors, and not the patient's toilet. Don't bring food, toys or special pillows, blankets or pets into the patient's room unless approved in advance by the staff.

The [MedlinePlus website](#) urges visitors to keep their hands away from their faces and to cough and sneeze into a tissue or the crease of the elbow. Avoid coughing or sneezing into the air. Wash your hands after tending to a cough or a sneeze.

Don't Contribute to Hospital Room Clutter

The [Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology website](#) recommends you think twice about cluttering up the patient's room with personal items. Clutter makes cleaning more difficult, and cleaning and sanitizing surfaces are a critical part of healthcare. The association notes patient items should be kept off the floor and away from waste containers. The bedside table and over the bed table also should be kept clear of unnecessary items that interfere with environmental cleaning. [In fact, a recent Wall Street Journal article](#) on reducing hospital infections quotes this advice from a founder of a patient advocacy and education group: "forget flowers and candy; bring bleach wipes instead," she says. "It could save their life."

Visiting friends and family in healthcare facilities can be an emotional experience, but keep in mind that your actions in the healthcare setting can affect the health of the patient you visit. Tuck these hints away for the next time you call on someone in a healthcare setting to help ensure your visit is a healthy one.

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