

# Healthcare Associated Infection (HAI): important information

What is HAI and how does it affect patients and the people around them? This leaflet has been written to answer these questions.

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## What is HAI?

HAI stands for Healthcare Associated Infection and is an infection acquired in the hospital or other healthcare setting.

Infections are caused by germs such as bacteria, fungi or viruses entering the body. They can be minor and stay in one area, like a boil or a chest infection or they can spread throughout the body, like 'flu or septicaemia (blood poisoning). Most times, infections are easily dealt with, but occasionally they cause serious problems.

A person with an HAI might have needed, for example, a surgical operation, the passing of a tube (urinary catheter) to drain the bladder, artificial feeding, or a tube (central venous catheter) put into a major vein, usually in the neck or chest, to enable fluids or drugs to be given straight into the blood stream. It might be that they just needed to undergo tests, to receive general care or the attention of a special therapist.

Sometimes they could be a member of staff involved in healthcare or a visitor to the healthcare setting. All infections arising from a visit, work contact, investigation or treatment are called an HAI.

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## Is HAI common?

Thousands of infections occur every year, costing the NHS many millions of pounds. These infections, if they occur in hospital, can add many days to a person's stay, and may result in the need for additional treatment. Occasionally the infection may be fatal. National surveys suggest that as many as 1 in 10 patients receiving hospital care will acquire an HAI.

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## How can you tell if someone has an HAI?

Patients, staff or visitors who have an HAI will present with symptoms or signs of an infection. Healthcare staff will recognise these as being linked to tests, treatment or contact with healthcare premises. HAI may be diagnosed from swabs sent from a wound, blood, urine, sputum or stool. It can sometimes be part of an outbreak of infection such as a 'Norovirus' vomiting and diarrhoea or there may be just one person with the infection.

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## How did I get an HAI?

The germs, which have caused the HAI, may be your own or have been acquired in the hospital or other healthcare setting. Not all HAI is preventable. It may occur because of your underlying health problems or be a known complication of the surgical operation or medical care that you have undergone.

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## The Infection Prevention & Control Team

Many experts believe that up to a third of HAI may be preventable. The Infection Prevention & Control Team consists of doctors, nurses, scientists and administrative staff. They work within NHS Borders with all staff to make the healthcare facilities and healthcare itself as safe as possible whether it takes place whilst you are in one of NHS Borders hospitals' or in the community whilst you are at home.

The Infection Prevention & Control Team is always available to provide advice and answer your specific questions or concerns. They also monitor infections and germs found by scientists in the laboratory or that are reported to them by healthcare staff. They ensure that when necessary changes in your care are put in to place to reduce the chances of the germ and infection spreading to others.

They provide training and education to all staff. They are part of the group that alert the Chief Executive of the organisation to problems, infection risks or concerns over the quality of care. They help advise on any needed improvements in procedures or facilities in relation to the prevention, control or management of HAI.

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## **How does HAI change my care – what will happen?**

If you have a local infection such as a wound infection, a chest infection, a urinary tract infection you may be given an antibiotic. Sometimes you may be given an antiseptic body/hair wash, powder or ointment.

If you are not already receiving care in a single room, you may sometimes need to be moved to one. This may be to protect you from an infection or to allow you to have the best care whilst you have an infection.

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## **Can I have visitor – will HAI harm my family or friends?**

Most HAI's do not harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies. Your doctor, nurse or therapist will usually tell you if there are specific issues to consider or if you are unsure about a particular visitor who has a long-term health problem.

A member of the Infection Prevention & Control Team is always available if asked. There may also be an information leaflet that you can read about a germ or infection.

Very occasionally, your visitor will be asked to put on a disposable plastic apron, gloves and rarely a mask. Usually, your visitors will just be asked to wash their hands after visiting so that the germs are not spread to others.

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## **Will I have to stay longer in hospital because I have an HAI??**

Some patients will have to stay longer in hospital until the infection shows signs of clearing up. Often you will be able to go home, perhaps whilst completing the specific treatment for the infection. If you develop an infection once you have gone home you should normally ask your general practitioner for advice.

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## **Where can I get more information about HAI?**

The Chief Medical Officer is leading a number of programmes in Scotland to prevent and control HAI. 'Health Protection Scotland' monitor some types of HAI across Scotland. More information can be found at:

### **Need further advice or information?**

- ❖ [www.hps.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk)
- ❖ [www.nhshealthquality.org](http://www.nhshealthquality.org)
- ❖ NHS Inform [www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 [www.nhs24.co.uk](http://www.nhs24.co.uk)
- ❖ [www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk)
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

This document is available on request in different languages, audio tape, Braille format, large print or BSL DVD. Please contact:

NHS Borders on 01896 825522 or email [equality@borders.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@borders.scot.nhs.uk)

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