Preventing healthcare associated infection (HAI)

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Summary

- There are things you can do before and during your stay in hospital that will help reduce the chance of you getting an infection.
- Common types of healthcare associated infections are those associated with chest infections, surgical wounds or the insertion of medical devices such as an intravenous drip, urinary catheter or wound drain.
- Some people are more susceptible to healthcare associated infections than others.

What are healthcare associated infections?

An infection is a disease caused by micro-organisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites. These micro-organisms are also called ‘bugs’ or ‘germs’.

Healthcare associated infections (HAIs) are infections that people catch when they are receiving care in a healthcare facility – for example, in hospital, at a GP surgery, in a nursing home, or even at home. Bacteria are the most common cause of HAIs.

HAIs occur at a cost to the patient and the community because they cause:

- illness to the patient
- a longer stay in hospital
- a longer recovery time
- costs associated with a longer stay in hospital and longer recovery time.

All healthcare facilities should have infection control procedures and policies, and staff should take every precaution to avoid spreading infection. However, the risk of infection can never be completely eliminated and some people have a higher risk of acquiring an infection than others.

Many types of infection can be picked up during healthcare including wound, bloodstream, urinary tract and chest infections.

There are things you can do before and during your treatment that will help reduce the chance of picking up an infection.

Susceptibility to healthcare associated infection

All people admitted to hospital are at some risk of contracting an HAI. If you are very sick or have had surgery, you have an increased risk. Some people are more vulnerable than others, including:

- premature babies
- very sick children
- elderly people
- frail people
- people with certain medical conditions, such as diabetes
- people with low immunity – such as people with diseases that compromise their immune system or people who are being treated with chemotherapy or steroids.

Risk factors for acquiring an HAI

There are other risk factors that may increase your risk of acquiring an HAI. These include:

- increased length of stay – a long hospital stay can increase your risk of HAI, for example, if you are admitted to hospital for complex or multiple illnesses
- surgical procedures – the length and type of surgery can increase the risk
- hand hygiene techniques – inadequate hand hygiene practices by hospital staff and patients may increase your risk
- invasive procedures – some procedures that bypass the body’s normal protective layer, the skin, can introduce infection into the body – for example, insertion of urinary catheters, IV cannulas, respiratory equipment and drain tubes
- non-intact skin – wounds, incisions (surgical cuts), burns and ulcers are more prone to infection than intact skin.

Types of healthcare associated infection

The most common types of infection acquired in hospitals are:

- bloodstream infection
- urinary tract infection (UTI)
- wound infection
- pneumonia (lung infection).
Infections are treated with antibiotics and usually respond well. Occasionally, infections can be serious and life threatening. Some bacteria are hard to treat because they are resistant to standard antibiotics. These bacteria are sometimes called ‘superbugs’.

Some examples of ‘superbugs’ are:
- methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus – often called ‘golden staph’ or MRSA
- vancomycin resistant Enterococcus – also referred to as VRE
- carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae – also referred to as CPE.

**Preventing healthcare associated infections**

Healthcare workers use various well established procedures to help prevent infections, including:
- infection control procedures and policies
- correct and frequent hand hygiene measures by all staff and patients
- keeping the healthcare environment and equipment clean
- complying with standard sterile techniques when performing surgery, caring for wounds or inserting and caring for medical devices such as intravenous cannulas and urinary catheters
- using antibiotics appropriately to prevent and treat infections.

Hospitals will also participate in surveillance programs to monitor infection rates and measure the impact of infection prevention practices.

**Before admission to hospital**

If you are going to hospital, there are things you can do before admission and in hospital that will help reduce the chance of you getting an infection. Steps to follow before you go to hospital include:
- stop smoking – smoking can interfere with healing processes. It also damages your airways, which can increase your chances of getting a chest infection
- maintain a healthy weight – people who are overweight are more prone to infection
- inform your doctor of all existing or recent illness – a cold or the flu can lead to a chest infection, so let your doctor or the hospital staff know if you are not well
- manage diabetes – if you are a diabetic, make sure that your blood sugar levels are under control.

**During your hospital stay**

Some things that can help reduce the chance of infection while you are in hospital include:
- Make sure that you clean your hands often with soap and running water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after using the toilet and before eating.
- Don’t be afraid to ask nursing and medical staff if they have cleaned their hands before they touch you.
- If you have an IV cannula, let your nurse know if the site around the needle is red, swollen, painful or leaking.
- Tell your nurse if any dressings are not clean, dry and attached around your wound.
- Let your nurse know if tubes or catheters feel displaced.
- Let your nurse or doctor know if you have diarrhoea.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Complete any course of antibiotics that you start.
- Ask relatives or friends who have colds or are unwell not to visit.

**What to expect if you get an infection in hospital**

If you do get an infection in hospital, measures (apart from antibiotic treatment) may be put in place to stop the spread of the infection to other patients.

Depending on the type of infection, these measures might include:
- being moved to a single room with your own bathroom
- being nursed by staff wearing gloves and gowns
- being put last on the surgery list.

**What to do if you are unhappy with your healthcare**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your condition or the care you are receiving please speak directly to your treating doctor or nursing staff as this is often the quickest and easiest way to resolve issues.

If you are unable to take your complaint to the health service provider directly or the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction, there is more you can do:
- take a look at Better Health Channel’s Complaints about health services page
- visit the Health Complaints Commissioner webpage.

**Where to get help**

- Your nursing staff
- Your doctor
- Hospital infection control department
- Health Complaints Commissioner

References
Send us your feedback

Thank you. Your feedback has been successfully sent.

More information

Infections

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- **Infection explained**
- **Preventing infections**
- **Managing infections**
- **Childhood infections**
- **Animal to human infections**
- **A-Z of infectious disorders**

**Infection explained**

- **Antibiotic resistant bacteria**
  
  Careful prescribing of antibiotics will minimise the emergence of antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria...

- **Beat the Bite**

  Beat the Bite is a Victorian government health campaign to highlight awareness of the risk of mosquito-borne diseases in Victoria. Find resources to be printed and shared along with videos that tell...

- **Chest infections**

  A chest infection affects your lungs, either in the larger airways (bronchitis) or in the smaller air sacs (pneumonia)...

- **Fever**

  A mild fever up to 39°C can actually help the immune system to get rid of an infection...

- **Immunisation history statements for children**

  By law, parents or guardians must provide an Immunisation History Statement when enrolling children in any childcare service, kindergarten or primary school in Victoria...

- **Infection risk - cardiac surgery and mycobacteria**

  Mycobacterium chimaera is a type of bacterium known as a non-tuberculous mycobacterium (NTM). There is a risk that heater cooler units (HCUs) used in cardiac (heart) surgery may be contaminated with...

- **Who provides immunisations in Victoria**

  Immunisations in Victoria are provided by local councils, GPs and specially qualified nurses in medical clinics and community health services, some Maternal and Child Health nurses, travel clinics and...

**Preventing infections**

- **Antibacterial cleaning products**

  The Western obsession with cleanliness may be partly responsible for the increase in allergic asthma and conditions such as rhinitis...

- **Beat the Bite! Mosquito-borne disease risk and management (video)**

  Dr Finn Romanes, public health doctor at Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services explains the department’s program to monitor and manage the risks associated with Mosquitoes. Learn about the...

- **Food safety while travelling**

  Travelling, eating and drinking go together but unfortunately, traveller's diarrhoea and other food-related illnesses can sometimes come along for the ride...

- **Handwashing - why it's important**

  Washing your hands with soap and warm water can help prevent the spread of infectious diseases...

- **Home tattooing**
Home tattooing, or getting tattoos overseas, puts you at risk of serious complications that can be debilitating and life-long.

- **Immunisation history statements for children**
  By law, parents or guardians must provide an Immunisation History Statement when enrolling children in any childcare service, kindergarten or primary school in Victoria.

- **Kissing and your health**
  While disease-causing bugs can be transferred during a kiss, most won't cause disease and the risk of serious disease is very small.

- **Personal hygiene**
  Good personal hygiene is one of the most effective ways to protect ourselves and others from illness.

- **Pets – safe handling of reptiles and tropical fish**
  People in contact with tropical fish and reptiles such as turtles, lizards and snakes may be at risk of infections and illness due to germs (such as bacteria, viruses and parasites) carried on the...

- **Piercings**
  If you want to have your body pierced, choose an experienced, registered practitioner to reduce the risks of infection and scarring.

- **Preventing healthcare associated infection (HAI)**
  There are things you can do to reduce the chance of getting an infection while you are in hospital.

- **Quarantine at home - coping tips**
  You may be asked to quarantine yourself at home if you have developed, or been exposed to, an infectious disease.

- **Tattoos**
  If you want to get a tattoo, choose an experienced, registered practitioner to reduce the risks of infection and scarring.

- **Travel health and safety tips (slide show)**
  We all love travelling to new and exotic places, but unfortunately illnesses and unforeseen events can ruin the trip of a lifetime. With a little effort, take a few of these simple precautions to make...

- **Travel immunisation**
  If you are travelling overseas, check with your doctor well in advance to find out what immunisations you need.

- **Vaccines**
  Vaccines trick the body into building immunity against infectious diseases without causing the actual disease.

- **Who provides immunisations in Victoria**
  Immunisations in Victoria are provided by local councils, GPs and specially qualified nurses in medical clinics and community health services, some Maternal and Child Health nurses, travel clinics and...

- **Workplace safety - infection control**
  The spread of many pathogens in the workplace can be prevented with regular hand washing.

**Managing infections**

- **Antibiotic resistant bacteria**
  Careful prescribing of antibiotics will minimise the emergence of antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria.

- **Handwashing - why it's important**
  Washing your hands with soap and warm water can help prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

- **Medicines and side effects**
  Complementary medicines can interact with pharmaceutical medicines.

- **Medicines - safety issues**
  Make sure your doctor knows about every medicine you take, including vitamins.

- **Preventing healthcare associated infection (HAI)**

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There are things you can do to reduce the chance of getting an infection while you are in hospital...

- **Quarantine at home - coping tips**
  You may be asked to quarantine yourself at home if you have developed, or been exposed to, an infectious disease...
- **Workplace safety - infection control**
  The spread of many pathogens in the workplace can be prevented with regular hand washing...

**Childhood infections**

- **Beat the Bite**
  Beat the Bite is a Victorian government health campaign to highlight awareness of the risk of mosquito-borne diseases in Victoria. Find resources to be printed and shared along with videos that tell...
- **Boils**
  Some areas of the body are more susceptible to boils, including the face, throat, armpits, groin and buttocks...
- **Chickenpox**
  Chickenpox is highly contagious, but it is generally mild and gets better without the need for special treatment...
- **Coughing and wheezing in children**
  Coughing and wheezing in babies can be distressing for you and your baby, but in most cases symptoms can be relieved at home...
- **Croup**
  Croup is a viral infection of the throat and windpipe that causes noisy breathing, a hoarse voice and a harsh, barking cough...
- **Diphtheria**
  Diphtheria is a serious bacterial disease that causes severe inflammation of the nose, throat and windpipe...
- **Fever - children**
  Fever is a way in which the body fights infection. A fever is not dangerous and does not always indicate a serious illness...
- **Fever - febrile convulsions**
  A febrile convulsion is a fit that occurs in children when they have a high fever...
- **Gastroenteritis in children**
  Gastroenteritis or Gastro can be dangerous for very young babies. Gastro is common in young children and spreads easily. Gastro is a bowel infection which causes diarrhoea (runny or watery poo) and...
- **Hand, foot and mouth disease**
  Good personal hygiene is essential to prevent the spread of hand, foot and mouth disease to others, both for those infected and their carers...
- **Impetigo - school sores**
  Impetigo, or school sores, is a highly contagious skin infection that commonly affects school-aged children...
- **Measles**
  Measles can cause serious and sometimes fatal complications, including pneumonia and brain inflammation...
- **Measles, mumps, rubella, varicella (chickenpox) – immunisation**
  Immunisation is the best protection against measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chickenpox)...
- **Melissa's story (video)**
  Melissa shares her story of how her baby caught chickenpox at 5 weeks old...
- **Meningitis**
  Meningitis can cause death and requires urgent medical attention...
- **Middle ear infections**
  Middle ear infections often happen during or after a child has a cold...
- **Mumps**
  Mumps is a viral illness that causes fever and swollen salivary glands, and a swollen face...
- **Roseola infantum**
  Roseola is a mild viral infection with associated fever and rash that affects babies and young children.

- **Rubella**
  Rubella is a mild illness for most people, but very dangerous for pregnant women and their babies.

- **Slapped cheek disease**
  Children with slapped cheek do not need to be kept home from school or day care, as cases are only contagious before the onset of the rash.

- **Streptococcal infection – group B**
  Group B streptococcal bacteria can cause a wide range of illnesses in susceptible people including newborns, the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes or cancer. Out...

- **Viral encephalitis**
  Viral encephalitis is inflammation of the brain caused by a virus and can cause permanent brain damage.

- **Whooping cough**
  The major symptom of whooping cough is a severe cough, which is often followed by a 'whooping' sound.

- **Whooping cough – a family’s experience (video)**
  A family shares their experience when their baby daughter contracted whooping cough (or pertussis).

### Animal to human infections

- **Anthrax**
  Anthrax is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial disease that occasionally infects humans.

- **Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV)**
  The simplest form of prevention for lyssavirus is to avoid close contact with bats.

- **Barmah Forest virus disease**
  Barmah Forest virus (BFV) disease can cause joint inflammation and pain, fatigue and a rash of variable appearance. A full recovery can be expected. Most people recover completely within six months.

- **Beat the Bite**
  Beat the Bite is a Victorian government health campaign to highlight awareness of the risk of mosquito-borne diseases in Victoria. Find resources to be printed and shared along with videos that tell...

- **Beat the Bite! Mosquito-borne disease risk and management (video)**
  Dr Finn Romanes, public health doctor at Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services explains the department’s program to monitor and manage the risks associated with Mosquitoes. Learn about the...

- **Bird flu (avian influenza)**
  The symptoms of bird flu in humans are similar to those of regular influenza.

- **Dengue virus disease**
  Dengue virus disease (dengue fever, or ‘dengue’) is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes in many tropical and subtropical parts of the world.

- **Hendra virus**
  The best defence against Hendra virus is to avoid contact with an infected horse.

- **Leptospirosis**
  Leptospirosis is a disease spread from animals to humans, caused by infection with the bacteria Leptospira.

- **Malaria**
  Travellers who visit malarial locations should avoid mosquito bites and take anti-malarial drugs.

- **Mosquitoes can carry diseases**
  You can reduce the risk of mosquito bites if you get rid of potential mosquito breeding sites around your home.

- **Murray Valley encephalitis**
  The only protection from Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) is to avoid mosquito bites.
Pets – safe handling of reptiles and tropical fish

People in contact with tropical fish and reptiles such as turtles, lizards and snakes may be at risk of infections and illness due to germs (such as bacteria, viruses and parasites) carried on the...

Pinworms

Despite the unsavoury reputation, a pinworm infection (worms) is relatively harmless and easily treated...

Psittacosis - parrot fever

People who have birds as pets, poultry workers and anyone working in aviaries or pet shops, are most at risk of catching psittacosis...

Q fever

Q fever is caused by a micro-organism that can be carried by cattle, sheep and goats...

Ross River virus disease

Most people recover from Ross River virus disease, although some people have symptoms for a year or more...

Tapeworms and hydatid disease

It's important for your own health to control tapeworm infection in your dog...

Toxoplasmosis

Problems only occur if a woman becomes infected with parasites that cause toxoplasmosis for the first time while pregnant...

West Nile virus

All disease-carrying mosquitoes breed in water or require water to enable eggs to hatch...

Zika virus

Zika virus is a mosquito-borne virus. There is no cure, specific treatment or vaccine for Zika virus...

A-Z of infectious disorders

Anthrax

Anthrax is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial disease that occasionally infects humans...

Aspergillus

Aspergillus is a fungus that commonly grows on rotting vegetation. It can cause asthma symptoms...

Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV)

The simplest form of prevention for lyssavirus is to avoid close contact with bats...

Bacterial vaginosis

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is caused by an imbalance of the bacteria normally present in the vagina...

Barmah Forest virus disease

Barmah Forest virus (BFV) disease can cause joint inflammation and pain, fatigue and a rash of variable appearance. A full recovery can be expected. Most people recover completely within six months...

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Beat the Bite mosquitoes - learn how to beat the bite (video)

Hear from Victoria's Chief Health Officer talk about how you can protect yourself from mosquitoes this season...

Bird flu (avian influenza)

The symptoms of bird flu in humans are similar to those of regular influenza...

Bites and stings – first aid

If you are bitten or stung by an insect or animal, apply first aid and seek medical treatment as soon as possible...

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- **Boils**
  Some areas of the body are more susceptible to boils, including the face, throat, armpits, groin and buttocks.

- **Botulism**
  Botulism is considered a medical emergency. If untreated, it may cause death.

- **Buruli ulcer**
  Since the ulcer gets bigger with time, early diagnosis and prompt treatment of Bairnsdale disease can keep skin loss to a minimum.

- **Candida auris (C. auris)**
  Candida is a genus of fungi (yeasts) that live on the skin and inside the human body. Candida auris (also called C. auris) is an uncommon fungus that can cause serious infections.

- **Cellulitis**
  Cellulitis is a bacterial infection of the skin that occurs most commonly on the lower legs and in areas where the skin is damaged or inflamed.

- **Chest infections**
  A chest infection affects your lungs, either in the larger airways (bronchitis) or in the smaller air sacs (pneumonia).

- **Chickenpox**
  Chickenpox is highly contagious, but it is generally mild and gets better without the need for special treatment.

- **Chlamydia**
  Chlamydia is often called the 'silent infection' because most people do not realise they have it.

- **Colds**
  Cold viruses are spread by sneezing, coughing and hand contact.

- **Cold sores**
  Cold sores are blisters around the mouth and nose, caused by the herpes simplex virus.

- **Coughing and wheezing in children**
  Coughing and wheezing in babies can be distressing for you and your baby, but in most cases symptoms can be relieved at home.

- **Croup**
  Croup is a viral infection of the throat and windpipe that causes noisy breathing, a hoarse voice and a harsh, barking cough.

- **Cystitis**
  Cystitis is the most common urinary tract infection in women.

- **Cytomegalovirus (CMV)**
  If an unborn baby gets CMV from their mother, it can cause hearing loss and intellectual disability.

- **Dengue virus disease**
  Dengue virus disease (dengue fever, or 'dengue') is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes in many tropical and subtropical parts of the world.

- **Diarrhoea**
  Acute diarrhoea in babies and young children can be life threatening.

- **Diphtheria**
  Diphtheria is a serious bacterial disease that causes severe inflammation of the nose, throat and windpipe.

- **Ebola virus disease (EVD)**
  Ebola virus is a rare disease that can cause severe symptoms and can be life-threatening.

- **Epididymitis**
  Epididymitis is an infection that causes inflammation of the epididymis.

- **Eyes - trachoma**
  A clean face and clean environment are the best protection against trachoma.

- **Fatigue fighting tips**
Activity and nutrition help fight fatigue and put more energy into your daily life...

- Fever - children
  Fever is a way in which the body fights infection. A fever is not dangerous and does not always indicate a serious illness...

- Fever - febrile convulsions
  A febrile convolution is a fit that occurs in children when they have a high fever...

- Flu (influenza)
  Influenza (the flu) is caused by a virus. The flu is more than just a bad cold and can occasionally lead to serious complications, including death. Specific antiviral medication is available. It is...

- Food poisoning - listeria
  Listeria infection is uncommon but very dangerous for the elderly, people whose immune systems are not working properly and pregnant women and their unborn babies...

- Gastroenteritis
  It is important to establish the cause of gastro, as different types of gastroenteritis respond to different treatments...

  - Gastroenteritis - amoebiasis
    Amoebiasis can cause diarrhoea among travellers to developing countries...

  - Gastroenteritis - campylobacteriosis
    Campylobacteriosis is a type of gastroenteritis and is more common in children under five years of age and young adults...

  - Gastroenteritis - cryptosporidiosis
    Outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis have been associated with child care centres, public swimming pools and contaminated water supplies...

  - Gastroenteritis - giardiasis
    Most people infected with Giardia parasites do not develop symptoms but can still spread the infection to others...

  - Gastroenteritis in children
    Gastroenteritis or Gastro can be dangerous for very young babies. Gastro is common in young children and spreads easily. Gastro is a bowel infection which causes diarrhoea (runny or watery poo) and...

  - Gastroenteritis - salmonellosis
    You may be more prone to salmonellosis if you are elderly, have another medical condition (such as a weakened immune system) or are malnourished...

  - Gastroenteritis - shigellosis
    Outbreaks of shigellosa gastroenteritis can occur in institutional settings, particularly where children are still in nappies or adults are incontinent...

- Genital herpes
  Many people with genital herpes are not aware that they have the infection, because they have no symptoms...

- Genital warts
  Genital warts are one of the most common sexually transmissible infections...

- Glandular fever
  Glandular fever is most common among high school and university students, but young children can also become infected by saliva on toys, shared cups, or the hands of carers...

- Gonorrhoea
  Gonorrhoea, also spelt gonorrhea, affects both men and women and is transmitted during sex, it may lead to infertility in women if left untreated...

- Haemolytic uraemic syndrome
  Haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS) is a rare condition which can lead to chronic kidney disease or death from kidney failure...

- Hand, foot and mouth disease
  Good personal hygiene is essential to prevent the spread of hand, foot and mouth disease to others, both for those infected and their carers...

- Heart conditions - endocarditis
  Endocarditis is an infection of the heart valves or the inner lining of the heart...

- Hendra virus
The best defence against Hendra virus is to avoid contact with an infected horse.

- **Hepatitis**
  Hepatitis is an umbrella term for several diseases that affect the liver.

- **Hepatitis A**
  Immunisation is the best protection against hepatitis A infection and it is recommended for people in high-risk groups.

- **Hepatitis B**
  Hepatitis B is a viral infection that affects the liver and can lead to serious illness or death.

- **Hepatitis C**
  In Australia, hepatitis C is most often spread through the sharing of unsterile drug injecting equipment. New all oral combination treatment has greatly improved health outcomes for people with.

- **Hepatitis C Cure - what it means for Victorians (video)**

- **HIV**
  In Australia, HIV is most commonly spread when having sex without a condom and when sharing needles and other injecting equipment.

- **Impetigo - school sores**
  Impetigo, or school sores, is a highly contagious skin infection that commonly affects school-aged children.

- **Labyrinthitis and vestibular neuritis**
  Labyrinthitis and vestibular neuritis are disorders that result in inflammation of the inner ear and the nerve connecting the inner ear to the brain.

- **Legionnaires’ disease**
  Legionnaires’ disease is a rare form of pneumonia.

- **Leprosy (Hansen’s disease)**
  Once a person with leprosy begins treatment they quickly become non-infectious.

- **Leptospirosis**
  Leptospirosis is a disease spread from animals to humans, caused by infection with the bacteria Leptospira.

- **Malaria**
  Travellers who visit malarial locations should avoid mosquito bites and take anti-malarial drugs.

- **Measles**
  Measles can cause serious and sometimes fatal complications, including pneumonia and brain inflammation.

- **Meningitis**
  Meningitis can cause death and requires urgent medical attention.

- **Meningococcal disease**
  Do not leave young adults alone if they suddenly develop a fever because they may become seriously ill very quickly.

- **Molluscum contagiosum**
  Molluscum contagiosum can be mistaken for genital warts or pimples, check with your doctor for an accurate diagnosis.

- **Mosquitoes can carry diseases**
  You can reduce the risk of mosquito bites if you get rid of potential mosquito breeding sites around your home.

- **Mumps**
  Mumps is a viral illness that causes fever and swollen salivary glands, and a swollen face.

- **Murray Valley encephalitis**
  The only protection from Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) is to avoid mosquito bites.
New drugs for the treatment of hepatitis C – Frequently Asked Questions for patients

In Australia, hepatitis C is most often spread through the sharing of unsterile drug injecting equipment. New all oral combination treatment has greatly improved health outcomes for people with...

Osteomyelitis

Osteomyelitis means an infection of bone which can either be recent or longstanding...

Parechovirus

Good personal hygiene is essential to prevent the spread of parechovirus to others, both for those infected and their carers...

Pericarditis

Pericarditis symptoms may be similar to those of heart attack and include chest pain and abnormal heart rhythms...

Pests – safe handling of reptiles and tropical fish

People in contact with tropical fish and reptiles such as turtles, lizards and snakes may be at risk of infections and illness due to germs (such as bacteria, viruses and parasites) carried on the...

Pinworms

Despite the unsavoury reputation, a pinworm infection (worms) is relatively harmless and easily treated...

Pleurisy

Treating any infection of the upper respiratory tract quickly will reduce the risk of developing pleurisy...

Pneumococcal disease

Pneumococcal disease is a leading cause of serious illness and death in young children...

Pneumonia

Anyone can get pneumonia, but young children and the elderly are most susceptible...

Polio and post-polio syndrome

Polio is a serious disease that can cause life-threatening paralysis and possibly death...

Psittacosis - parrot fever

People who have birds as pets, poultry workers and anyone working in aviaries or pet shops, are most at risk of catching psittacosis...

Q fever

Q fever is caused by a micro-organism that can be carried by cattle, sheep and goats...

Reactive arthritis

Reactive arthritis is a form of arthritis that occurs as a result of some bacterial infections...

Rheumatic fever

Untreated rheumatic fever can lead to serious complications such as rheumatic heart disease...

Roseola infantum

Roseola is a mild viral infection with associated fever and rash that affects babies and young children...

Ross River virus disease

Most people recover from Ross River virus disease, although some people have symptoms for a year or more...

Rotavirus

Rotavirus is a common cause of viral gastroenteritis for Australian babies and preschool children...

Rubella

Rubella is a mild illness for most people, but very dangerous for pregnant women and their babies...

Salpingitis

Salpingitis is one of the most common causes of female infertility and may permanently damage the fallopian tubes...

Septicaemia

Bacteria in the bowels, urinary tract, mouth and skin can cause disease if they get into the bloodstream...

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• **Shiga toxin-producing E.coli**
  There are many types of E.coli bacteria, most of which are harmless. However, some types of E.coli produce toxins (poisons) that can cause gastroenteritis (gastro). One of these types of E.coli is...

• **Shingles**
  Shingles is caused by the same virus responsible for chickenpox.

• **Slapped cheek disease**
  Children with slapped cheek do not need to be kept home from school or day care, as cases are only contagious before the onset of the rash.

• **Smallpox**
  Smallpox was once a feared and highly contagious viral disease.

• **Staphylococcus aureus - golden staph**
  Hospital patients are more likely to be infected by golden staph because of surgical or other wounds.

• **Streptococcal infection - group A**
  Streptococcal infection? group A can cause sore throats (pharyngitis), scarlet fever or impetigo (school sores).

• **Streptococcal infection – group B**
  Group B streptococcal bacteria can cause a wide range of illnesses in susceptible people including newborns, the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes or cancer. Out...

• **Styes**
  Styes may be red and sore, but they generally do not cause any damage to the eye or eyelids.

• **Swimmer's ear**
  Swimmer's ear can be triggered by exposure to water or mechanical damage due to overzealous cleaning.

• **Tapeworms and hydatid disease**
  It's important for your own health to control tapeworm infection in your dog.

• **Tetanus**
  Tetanus is a life-threatening disease and immunisation is the best way to reduce your risk.

• **Time to immunise - free vaccines for men who have sex with men**
  Immunisation is one of the best ways you can protect yourself and others from infectious diseases in our community. In partnership with Thorne Harbour Health (formerly Victorian AIDS Council), the...

• **Tinea**
  Tinea is contagious and can be spread by skin-to-skin contact or indirectly through towels, clothes or floors.

• **Toxic shock syndrome (TSS)**
  If you think you could have toxic shock syndrome, stop using tampons immediately and go to the emergency department of your nearest hospital.

• **Toxoplasmosis**
  Problems only occur if a woman becomes infected with parasites that cause toxoplasmosis for the first time while pregnant.

• **Travel health - yellow fever immunisation**
  If you are travelling or passing through areas infected with yellow fever, some countries require you to be vaccinated.

• **Tuberculosis (TB)**
  Tuberculous is spread when a person with an active infection coughs, laughs, sings or sneezes.

• **Urinary tract infections (UTI)**
  Urinary tract infections (UTIs) can target the urethra, bladder or kidneys.

• **Vaginal thrush**
  Vaginal thrush is a common infection caused by an overgrowth of yeasts in the vagina.

• **Viral encephalitis**
  Viral encephalitis is inflammation of the brain caused by a virus and can cause permanent brain damage.
• **Viral haemorrhagic fever**
  
  Viral haemorrhagic fever (VHF) is an extremely infectious and life threatening disease caused by a group of viruses, including the Ebola virus.

• **Warts**
  
  Warts can be stubborn, so you may need to use more than one type of treatment.

• **West Nile virus**
  
  All disease-carrying mosquitoes breed in water or require water to enable eggs to hatch.

• **Whooping cough**
  
  The major symptom of whooping cough is a severe cough, which is often followed by a 'whooping' sound.

• **Whooping cough – a family’s experience (video)**
  
  A family shares their experience when their baby daughter contracted whooping cough (or pertussis).

• **Williams syndrome**
  
  Williams syndrome often goes undiagnosed, which means that some people with the disorder fail to get the support and treatment they need until later in life.

• **Zika virus**
  
  Zika virus is a mosquito-borne virus. There is no cure, specific treatment or vaccine for Zika virus.

**Related Information**

• **Bird flu (avian influenza)**
  
  The symptoms of bird flu in humans are similar to those of regular influenza.

• **Flu (influenza)**
  
  Influenza (the flu) is caused by a virus. The flu is more than just a bad cold and can occasionally lead to serious complications, including death. Specific antiviral medication is available. It is...

• **Quarantine at home - coping tips**
  
  You may be asked to quarantine yourself at home if you have developed, or been exposed to, an infectious disease.

• **Kissing and your health**
  
  While disease-causing bugs can be transferred during a kiss, most won’t cause disease and the risk of serious disease is very small.

• **Personal hygiene**
  
  Good personal hygiene is one of the most effective ways to protect ourselves and others from illness.

**Home**

**Content Partner**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by: VICNISS Hospital Acquired Infection Surveillance Centre

[VICNISS logo]

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