NORTH
Dakota | Health & Human Services
Be Legendary.

How You Can Protect Your Sick Loved One

Infections are illnesses that are caused by germs such as bacteria, fungi, parasites, and viruses. Exposing patients who are ill to these germs may make it harder for the patient to recover and go home. If you are visiting a friend or loved one, you need to take steps to prevent spreading germs.

The best way to **stop the spread of germs** is to:

- **Wash your hands** often
- **Stay home if you are sick**- Do not visit the hospital if you are sick or have had any ill symptoms including but not limited to nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever (or feeling feverish), uncontrolled cough, or rash
- 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.

Be Aware of Risks Because You Care

Hands are the most common way germs are spread. **Hand hygiene is one of the most important ways family and friends can stop the spread of germs and infections**. The soap and hand sanitizer in patient rooms are for **everyone** to use!

- **Wash or sanitize your hands when entering and leaving the room.** Remind healthcare workers to do the same before providing care to your loved ones.
- To provide comfort to sick patients, visitors often want to hold hands with or hug or kiss their family members. While these actions show love and friendship, they can also contribute to spreading germs. Visitors should **use care when hugging a patient to ensure their hands, lips, or clothing is not touching an area where the patient is vulnerable to infection.**
  - Medical devices like an IV, feeding tube, or an opening into the body such as a wound or surgical site create an opportunity for germs to enter the patient's body or bloodstream and cause infection.

Surfaces can become contaminated easily in healthcare settings from germs in the air or from blood and bodily fluids. Oftentimes, these germs are too small to see with the naked eye. To avoid spreading germs on surfaces, visitors and patients should:

- **Wash or use hand sanitizer** before and after touching medical devices, equipment, bedrails, surfaces, or openings into the body, before and after eating and after using the restroom.
- **Keep clutter to a minimum** and keep patient belongings off the floor and away from waste containers.
- **Allow people to clean the hospital room**, even when it feels inconvenient. Cleaning and disinfecting the room helps keep everyone safe by reducing risk of developing an infection—don't say, "come back later."