

## Influenza and Norovirus: Steps to Prevent Outbreaks

Infections such as norovirus and influenza are more common in winter because people spend more time indoors, close to one another, making it easier for the infections to spread from person to person.

The best ways to prevent the spread of these infections are **frequent hand cleaning** and **staying home when sick**. It is important that healthcare workers clean their hands before and after contact with the patient (or patient environment), and that they stay home if they have symptoms of an infection, such as influenza or norovirus, so that they don't pass their infection on to patients and colleagues.



**Hand hygiene is the single most effective way of preventing the transmission of infections.** Because microorganisms can be spread by anyone, hand hygiene is everybody's responsibility: staff, patients, residents, visitors, and volunteers.

Either alcohol based hand rub (ABHR) or soap and warm water are accepted methods of hand hygiene:

- soap and water are preferred if you have contact with a patient who is suspected of having infectious diarrhea, or if your hands are visibly soiled
- otherwise, you can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer

**Cough etiquette** is also important: people should cover their cough or sneeze by using their arm (not their hand!) to suppress the spray of mucous. If people cough into their hands, then touch shared surfaces (such as door handles and elevator buttons), this spreads germs.



In hospitals and long-term care facilities, visitors and volunteers also play an important role in supporting patient care, and should be advised not to visit the facility if they have GI symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea, etc. During an outbreak, visitors and volunteers should be warned that they may be at risk of acquiring an infection within the facility. Visitors should visit only their own friend/relative in their own room, unless otherwise approved by the staff. They should also be instructed on how to wear appropriate personal protective equipment (such as gloves and gowns) and encouraged to use hand hygiene before and after their visits.

For more information on infection prevention and control practices, please refer to PICNet's [Gastrointestinal Infection Outbreak Guidelines for Healthcare Facilities](#); and for provincial hand hygiene guidelines, refer to the [Best Practices for Hand Hygiene in All Healthcare Settings and Programs](#). You can find both documents on the PICNet website ([www.picnet.ca](http://www.picnet.ca)).

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## **Are your colleagues and staff trained in infection control?**

PICNet has several free online educational modules on its website. These modules are designed for all direct care providers of any discipline. For those new to infection control (or in need of a refresher), we recommend the **Infection Prevention and Control Basics** module and **Provincial Hand Hygiene** module. The Provincial Hand Hygiene module is a good, basic overview of hand hygiene that anyone can take: healthcare staff, housekeeping staff, volunteers, and even visitors. The Infection Control Basics module is a higher level course, designed for healthcare workers.

You can find links to all the infection control education modules on the PICNet website, at <http://s.picnet.ca/edmodules>.



## **Questions about infection control?**

You can contact PICNet at [picnet@phsa.ca](mailto:picnet@phsa.ca), and find more resources at [www.picnet.ca](http://www.picnet.ca).