



Important Information on Preventing Infections For Moms, Families, and their Visitors

Preventing infection for you and your baby is important, particularly during the flu season. Infections can affect new moms, their babies, and families – often, simple preventive steps are the most effective thing we can all do to stop serious illnesses such as “the flu” (influenza), “whooping cough” (Pertussis), and other illnesses caused by a variety of bacteria and viruses. This hand-out provides information on how to prevent infection for yourself, your baby, and your family.

We ask that you keep the following in mind while you are here at BIDMC, and once you are at home:

The most important method of limiting infections is keeping hands clean. This is particularly important during flu season, but hand hygiene helps to prevent nearly all types of infections. Keep your hands clean, and remind your friends and family to do the same. You should expect that your nurse and doctor will clean their hands when they enter and leave your room.

It is also very important to limit contact with visitors who may have an infection. This is critical during the flu season (approximately October through April). But at any time of year, please ask friends and family to postpone their visit if they do not feel well, have been recently exposed to someone with the flu, or have a rash that has not been evaluated by a physician.

Vaccinate yourself and your family against “the flu” and “whooping cough”. Vaccines are safe and effective. Ask your Obstetrician about the influenza and Tdap vaccines. You will also be offered these vaccines here at BIDMC when you are admitted to the hospital.

It is important for you to know that some bacteria and viruses are naturally present on all human bodies, including those of newborn infants. Although most bacteria generally do not pose a threat for healthy babies and their parents, some may result in treatable skin infections, while some bacteria or viruses could be a problem for people who are very sick or for very premature babies.

One infection of particular concern is caused by methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA. MRSA is a type of bacteria that is resistant to certain antibiotics. Although MRSA is sometimes associated with a health care setting, it is often found in the community among healthy people who have not recently been in the hospital. We saw a sharp increase in this type of infection between November of 2008 and April 2009, and as a result, we strengthened our efforts on standard infection prevention practices such as hand hygiene and equipment and room cleaning, and took specific steps aimed at decreasing our patients’ risk of infection. These efforts have been associated with a decrease in these infections. We’re thankful for this success and proud of our model practices aimed at infection prevention.

In our efforts to do all we can to prevent any possible spread of infection within our units, we have made a change to the way we care for new babies’ umbilical cords. We apply “triple dye” to the umbilical cord. We know that the umbilical cords can be a particularly common site of bacterial colonization. Triple dye is an antiseptic that has been used for umbilical cord care for decades. It is very effective at reducing bacterial colonization of the umbilical cord, and it is extremely safe. It does stain the umbilical cord a dark purple, but this color fades away in several days. We will apply triple dye to the umbilical cord once, shortly after your baby is born. Following that application, we recommend routine cord care -- cleaning with soap and water during a bath or if the umbilical cord appears dirty, but otherwise allowing it to dry and fall off naturally.

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We currently screen all mothers and newborns for MRSA. This involves gently rubbing swabs against parts of your skin and your baby's skin, and then testing those swabs for signs of the bacteria. For mothers, we perform these swabs when you are admitted to Labor and Delivery and again before you are discharged. For babies, we perform these swabs once following birth and again before going home. The knowledge that we gain from these screening cultures enables us to take the very best care of you and your baby, and it provides us with information that may help to prevent MRSA infections in others. If MRSA is found on your skin, we will make sure your Obstetrician and Pediatrician are informed so that they can discuss this with you and make any adjustments to your care if needed. Healthy mothers and infants that have MRSA colonization do not need any particular treatment – in fact, they often clear the MRSA in several weeks to months. But if you develop a skin infection or need to go into a hospital for other reasons, it is important that the doctors or nurses are aware of the MRSA, as that might change the antibiotics you are given.

Regardless of the result of your MRSA testing, if you notice a possible skin infection on you or your baby, in the hospital or after you go home, please inform your nurse or doctor. Skin infections typically appear like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, and painful, or have pus or other drainage.

We ask that you carefully read the additional information on cleaning your hands. Keeping your hands clean is the simplest and most powerful thing you can do to keep bacteria and viruses from spreading to other people and places.

If you have questions or concerns, please talk with your Obstetrician, Pediatrician, or OB Nurse.

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