

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:

Faye Salzer

Division of Disease Control

Phone: 701.328.2378

E-mail: fsalzer@nd.gov

It Takes a Team to Break the Chain of Infection!

Bismarck, N.D.— International Infection Prevention week is October 16-22, and the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds consumers and providers that it takes a team to break the chain of infection. Approximately one in 25 people in the United States will get an infection while in the hospital. But germs are *everywhere*—in schools, places of work, public transportation, and even homes! Germs can spread directly from one person to another, through environmental surfaces or from objects to people.

“Germs spread from person to person through a series of common events. In order to stop the spread of germs, we need to break the chain or cycle,” said Faye Salzer, Healthcare Associated Infections Coordinator with the NDDoH. “There are six points where the chain can be broken to stop germs; bacterial or viral,” said Salzer.

The six links of the chain are:

1. The **Infectious agent** is the germ that causes the disease/illness.
2. A **Reservoir** would be places where the germs live: people, medical equipment, water, contaminated surfaces, etc.
3. **Portal of exit** is the way the germ leaves the reservoir such as coughing, sneezing, wounds, body fluids, etc.
4. **Means of transmission** are ways germs could be shared, examples being from hands or direct contact with contaminated items, ingestion, and inhalation.
5. **Portal of entry** is the way the germ enters a new host which could be through a break in the skin (cut, scratch, wound), mucous membranes and respiratory tract.
6. A **Susceptible host** can be *any* person! In healthcare, the most vulnerable patients/residents are immunocompromised, or have invasive medical devices including IVs and other central lines, catheters, wounds, and airways.

“The only way to stop germs from spreading is to break the chain at any link. Practicing daily infection prevention can help people stay healthy, prevent the need for medical care, and will also help stop the spread of infections when visiting loved ones and friends in the hospital or nursing home,” said Salzer.

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Patients, families, and visitors can follow these simple steps to stop the chain of infection:

- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer frequently. This is the most important step to stop germs from spreading!
- Stay up to date on your vaccines.
- Get the flu shot yearly.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Stay at home when you are feeling ill.
- When visiting patients or residents, use protection such as gloves, gowns, and masks when recommended by staff.
- Clean and disinfect your environment.
- Follow safe injection practices —do not share insulin pens, blood glucose checking equipment, etc.
- Use antibiotics only as prescribed by your healthcare provider to prevent antibiotic resistance, and remember, antibiotics do not work with viruses!

For more information, contact Faye Salzer, NDDoH, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/disease/hai. To sign up for monthly alerts on infection-related topics and to learn more about what you can do in the home and community to prevent infections, visit the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology website at www.apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers or www.consumers.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-in/.

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