

**APIC, founded in 1972, is the leading provider of infection prevention resources through education, training, government advocacy, and implementation of research.**

APIC is an international organization of more than 14,000 members. APIC members represent healthcare facilities; including hospitals, outpatient surgery centers, long-term or specialty care facilities, and home care groups, as well as industry, and local and state health departments.

Many members serve on committees or boards of national organizations to influence improvements in patient safety in all healthcare settings across the nation.

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Spreading knowledge.  
Preventing infection.™

**The Association  
for Professionals  
in Infection Control  
and Epidemiology**

# Q&A

## Q: What are healthcare-associated infections (HAIs)?

**A:** Any infection that develops while a patient is being treated in a healthcare facility, or within a prescribed amount of time after exposure to a healthcare setting, is considered healthcare-associated.

## Q: How are these infections spread?

**A:** There are various modes of transmission. Most commonly, HAIs are spread by person-to-person contact or by touching a contaminated surface. Some infections can also be spread through the air via the breath of an infected person or through respiratory droplets produced by sneezing and/or coughing.

## Q: What are some examples of healthcare-associated infections?

**A:** You may already be familiar with some of the more commonly acquired HAIs, such as MRSA, *Clostridium difficile*, or catheter-associated urinary tract infections. Other worrisome conditions include ventilator-associated pneumonia, central line-associated bloodstream infections, surgical site infections, and influenza.

## Q: How does a patient acquire an infection while hospitalized?

**A:** Depending on the specific type of microorganism causing the infection, the patient could have gotten an infection from the unclean hands of healthcare workers, contact with non-sanitized medical equipment, unsafe surgical practices, exposure to other patients with an infectious disease, organisms on their body, or unsafe construction practices, just to name a few.

## Q: Does this happen often?

**A:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that one out of every 20 hospitalized patients will contract an HAI ([www.cdc.gov/HAI/burden.html](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/burden.html)). Some of these infections will be minor and easy to treat, while others will be life threatening.

## Q: Can these infections be prevented?

**A:** In most cases, yes. Many HAIs are preventable through the implementation of proven, evidence-based infection prevention protocols and procedures. That is why tracking, monitoring, and reporting infections represent only the beginning. For infection prevention programs to be successful, they must have staff and funds to implement and support them.



## Who are infection preventionists?

**Infection preventionists (IPs) are professionals who dedicate their careers to preventing healthcare-associated infections. These professionals play a significant role in:**

- Developing proven policies to ensure a safe environment for patients.
- Ensuring compliance with standards and regulations designed to protect our patients and healthcare workers.
- Tracking and monitoring activities to identify healthcare-associated infections and other infectious agents.
- Acting as leaders in emergency preparedness to be ready for events such as an influenza pandemic or acts of bioterrorism.
- Leading and participating in healthcare quality improvement efforts.
- Educating the public and healthcare personnel about infectious diseases and how to limit their spread.
- Reporting communicable diseases to the CDC.