

Hygiene

Glossary of Terms

Allergen: a substance that triggers an allergic reaction in people who are sensitive. Also called an antigen

Allergic reaction: The hypersensitive response of the immune system to an allergen, often causing swelling, itching, wheezing, nasal congestion and difficulty in breathing

Antibacterial hand wash / wipes: a hand cleaning product containing antibacterial agents which destroys harmful bacteria

Antibiotics: a group of medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria, but are ineffective against infections caused by viruses

Antigen: a substance that when introduced into the body stimulates the production of an antibody by the immune system

Antimicrobial resistance: the ability of a micro-organism to resist the action of antimicrobial or antibiotic drugs

Aspergillus: a family of fungal organisms and moulds mainly found in soil; some of which can cause moderate to severe disease in humans including allergic reactions, skin lesions and ulcers

Atopy: a genetic allergic hypersensitivity that makes an individual more likely to develop allergic reactions to specific allergens

Avian flu: an infectious respiratory disease caused by the H5N1 virus which usually affects species of bird, but can be contracted by humans following close or direct contact with infected birds

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting public health activities in the United States

Clostridium difficile (C. diff): an anaerobic bacterium that forms part of the normal gut flora, but can cause a number of problems including diarrhoea and abdominal pains if an individual is taking antibiotics

or in a hospital / care home environment with poor levels of hygiene. If the numbers of *C. diff* in the gut increase due to antibiotic use or poor hygiene, the bacteria release toxins that can cause bloating, constipation, and diarrhoea with abdominal pain, which may become severe

Coliforms: organisms which are present in the environment and in the faeces of all warm-blooded animals and humans. Their presence is often an indicator of poor hygiene

Common cold: a contagious, viral infectious disease of the upper respiratory system caused by more than 200 different viruses (including rhinoviruses the most common cause of colds) which infect the mucous membrane of the nose and cause symptoms such as sneezing and a runny nose

Contamination: the process by which bacteria or other microorganisms come into contact and infect an object or surface; further transfer to additional surfaces or objects causes **cross-contamination**

Diarrhoea: the passing of increased amounts of loose and watery stools more than three times a day; often a symptom of an infection or long-term condition which can cause severe dehydration and even death in the young and elderly

Enterobacteriaceae: a large family of bacteria that form part of the normal gut flora found in the intestines of humans and other animals, or are found mainly in water and soil. Their presence in the home indicate poor levels of personal and home hygiene and possible faecal contamination of surfaces and objects

Epidemic: the emergence of a new disease or disease to which few people have previously been exposed to, which affects many individuals in a country or region and where the number of cases of the disease substantially exceeds what is "expected," during a given period of time

Escherichia coli (E. coli): a type of bacterium which usually constitutes part of the normal gut flora in humans and animals, but can cause mild to severe illnesses from diarrhoea and abdominal cramps to kidney failure if more toxic strains are spread from person to person via contact with human or animal faeces. Some strains of *E. coli*, such as *E. coli* 0157 can produce a powerful toxin that causes bloody diarrhoea and can occasionally result in severe blood problems and kidney failure

Hand sanitiser: a gel, foam or liquid solution containing alcohol or other antimicrobial agents which destroy and eliminate germs and bacteria and is used as a supplement or alternative to hand washing when soap and water is unavailable

Hand washing: proper hand washing is the act of cleansing the hands with water, with the use of soap or other detergents in order to remove germs, soil and micro-organisms

Hospital-acquired infections (HAIs): an infection acquired during hospital care, which was not present or developing at the time of admission and mainly caused by poor standards of hygiene within the hospital

Hygiene: a set of practices associated with the preservation of health, healthy living and the prevention of disease and infection

Hygiene Council: a group of leading global experts in the fields of microbiology, virology, infectious diseases, immunology, and public health who offer realistic recommendations and advice to the public on the importance of hygiene in the home and community in order to help prevent the spread of disease and infection

Hygiene Hypothesis: a theory that states that exposure to microbes in the environment early in life reduces the risk of developing allergies by boosting immune system activity. The theory is not widely accepted and extensive evidence shows that increased levels of hygiene such as hand washing and surface disinfection reduces levels of infection, illness and mortality and does not correlate with any increase in atopic (allergic) diseases

Hygiene Standards: a set of practical recommendations and guidelines from the Hygiene Council that focuses on key areas of the home which should be monitored by the public to ensure good levels of home hygiene

Immune system: the biochemical complex that protects the body against infections and other foreign bodies that lead to illness

Immunisation: a process whereby an individual's immune system is exposed to a weakened strain of virus or bacteria in order to initiate an immune response and produce antibodies to destroy or disable the disease if encountered at a later date

Immunosuppression: an act that reduces the activation or efficacy of the immune system to fight foreign bodies and prevent illness or infection

Influenza (flu): a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract caused by influenza viruses, which can cause mild to severe illnesses such as headache, temperature and cough

Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA): a form of *Staphylococcus* bacteria which is resistant to methicillin and other commonly used antibiotics with similar structure and can be a common problem in hospital environments

Mould: a very large group of microscopic fungi that live on plant or animal matter which can be found in damp, poorly ventilated areas of the home. Regular or prolonged exposure to mould can cause mild to severe illnesses such as allergies, infections and respiratory disease

Norovirus: a group of small viruses transmitted in humans by faecally contaminated food and water or person-to-person contact and are notorious for causing gastroenteritis infection outbreaks

Pandemic: an epidemic on a global scale; the emergence of a new disease capable of spreading across a worldwide geographical area and causing high levels of morbidity and mortality to a substantial proportion of the worldwide population

Pathogen: any micro-organism (usually a parasite) that causes disease or illness to its host

Penicillium species (sp.): a family of fungal organisms commonly found in the human environment growing on decaying foodstuffs and causing a wide range of diseases in humans in those who are immunosuppressed. *Penicillium* is not harmful and is one of the most widely used antibiotics in the world to treat infections. Penicillin, as well as other antibiotics is obtained from *Penicillium* mould.

Prophylaxis: a medical treatment or action adopted for the prevention of a disease or health condition

Pseudomonas species (sp.): a bacterium normally present in soil, water and on the skin of animals and humans, which can cause a number of diseases ranging from minor skin infections to serious life-threatening illnesses in humans

Salmonella: a bacterium usually found in the gut of most animals which can cause food poisoning when humans consume contaminated poultry, meat or eggs

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS): a severe viral respiratory illness caused by SARS coronavirus (SARS CoV) which is spread by close human-human contact and surface contamination

Staphylococcus aureus (S. aureus): a bacterium commonly found on healthy human skin and mucosa in the nasal passages which can cause a range of diseases from food poisoning and minor skin infections to pneumonia and blood poisoning if the bacteria enters the human body

Sterilisation: any process that effectively destroys or eliminates bacteria from a surface, equipment, foodstuff or medication

Swine flu (Influenza A(H1N1)): a respiratory disease caused by influenza A(H1N1) which initially infected pigs, but contains genetic material from humans, birds and swine. It has recently been

contracted by humans and been spread to many countries through close human - human contact and surfaces

Vaccine: a preparation intended to produce immunity to a disease by stimulating the production of antibodies

World Health Organization: the organization responsible for providing leadership on global health matters and directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations