

MANAGEMENT OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES – GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Isolation (see also Chapter 26, *Nursing care and medical procedures*)

Isolation of a patient with an infectious disease is time-consuming and makes caring for the patient much more difficult. Isolation is generally required with diseases such as tuberculosis and whooping cough that spread via droplets. By contrast, there is no reason to isolate patients with sexually transmitted infections or with infections carried by vectors, such as malaria. With many infections, particularly viral infections, the patient is most likely to transmit the infection before becoming obviously ill: isolating such a patient once symptoms have appeared may not stop transmission.

✓ *What to do – precautions against spread of infection*

- Hand-washing is the best way to reduce the risk of infection being transmitted from one person to another:
 - hands should be washed before and after every contact with a patient, using alcohol-based gels or liquids rather than soap to disinfect the hands;
 - the use of gloves does not replace the need for hand-washing.
- Masks prevent spread of infection via droplets:
 - cloth and paper masks become ineffective if they are worn long enough to be dampened by the wearer's breath.
 - The precautions needed to prevent infection depend on the way each infection is spread (see Table 23.2).

Table 23.2 Precautions required to reduce risk of spreading infection on board.¹

How transmitted	Infection	Precautions required
By air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ tuberculosis ■ varicella 	Isolation in a single-berth cabin with door closed; mask for anyone entering the patient's cabin
By droplet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ meningitis ■ pertussis ■ plague ■ diphtheria ■ rubella ■ mumps 	Isolation in a single-berth cabin: door may be open; masks to be worn within one metre of patient
By direct (human) contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ enteric (gastrointestinal) infections ■ scabies ■ impetigo 	Contacts to wear disposable gloves; for close contact (e.g. to bathe or turn the patient); plastic overalls or aprons also essential