

Glove use – Patient leaflet

At The Royal Marsden, we are committed to keeping you safe and providing the best quality care. During your cancer journey, the treatment you receive, and the nature of your illness may affect your immune system. We take extra care to protect you from infections, including deciding when gloves are needed, and when clean, sanitised hands are the safer choice.

Why do healthcare workers need to wear non-sterile gloves?

Gloves are a type of personal protective equipment (PPE). They are worn to protect the hands of healthcare workers, such as your doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and any other hospital workers who may come in contact with patients.

Gloves protect staff by reducing the risk of contact with blood, body fluids such as urine or faeces, chemotherapy drugs or harmful cleaning products such as chlorine.

Gloves are never a substitute for good hand hygiene practices. Your protection from infection comes from staff cleaning their hands using soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub before and after every contact.

When will you see staff wearing gloves?

You will see staff wearing gloves when:

- There is a risk of touching blood, body fluids, or broken skin
- Giving certain cancer treatments or handling chemotherapy medication
- Accessing IV lines or urinary catheters
- Handling used linen

How we keep you safe?

Whether we have decided to wear gloves or not, we will always:

- Clean our hands before and after touching you or anything in your environment
- Use the right protective equipment for the situation
- Follow best practice guidelines to prevent the spread of infection

Hand hygiene

Staff will clean their hands with either soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub and both can be effective in killing harmful bacteria.

Alcohol based hand rub kills most harmful bacteria. However, if you are experiencing diarrhoea or vomiting, please tell staff as they will need to use soap and water to clean their hands as alcohol-based hand rub may not be as effective on these germs.

We recommend you also follow good hand hygiene practices by cleaning your hands:

- Before eating food
- Before touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- After using the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After touching hospital surfaces such as bed rails and bedside tables.

To effectively use alcohol-based hand rub:

- Place the product on your hands and rub together covering all surfaces until your hands feel dry. This should take around 15-20 seconds.

To effectively use soap and water:

- Wet your hands with lukewarm water and apply the soap. Rub your hands together into a lather and rub all over the top of your hands and in between your fingers. Continue rubbing for at least 20-30 seconds. Rinse the soap off your hands under running water and then thoroughly dry your hands.

Your voice matters

Please feel welcome to ask staff about glove use and provide feedback to us. Don't be afraid to use your voice: it's okay to ask your healthcare provider to clean their hands or to consider their glove use.

You can ask questions like:

- "Would you mind cleaning your hands again before you examine me?"
- "Can I ask why you are wearing gloves for this task?"
- "Why aren't you wearing gloves?"

Encourage your visitors to follow good hand hygiene practices.

Protecting you and the environment

The NHS uses millions of gloves every year. Most are made of single use plastic and take decades or centuries to break down. By reducing unnecessary glove use and focusing on good hand hygiene, we can keep you safe and protect the planet.

Need more information?

If you need any more information or have questions, please don't hesitate to speak to a member of staff or contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team.

