Health Protection Factsheet

Issue 5

Infection Prevention and Control

Guidance from the Department of Health states that: **"Good infection prevention and control is essential to ensure that people who use health and social care services receive safe and effective care."**

Infection prevention and control is a high priority for the Department of Health, reinforced with the standards set out in the Health & Social Care Act (2008) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) requirements.

Infection prevention and control means doing everything possible to prevent infection from both developing and spreading. Understanding how they occur and how different micro-organisms (germs) such as bacteria, viruses and fungi, act and spread is essential to preventing infections.

It can often be challenging to manage the spread of infections in community care and health buildings. Micro-organisms can be easily passed between people, equipment, the environment, and staff. Existing and emerging "super bugs" such as MRSA and MRGNB, means that care and vigilance is required at all times.

Every year more than 300,000 people contract an infection associated with healthcare. Therefore, effective prevention and control of infection must be part of everyday practice and be applied consistently by everyone.

If a person acquires a healthcare associated infection (HCAI) it can cause serious health problems and can make existing or underlying conditions worse, delay recovery and affect their quality of life.

It is important that other healthcare workers or providers (eg district nurse or hospital staff), know if a service user is at risk of contracting or has already contracted, an infection. An inter-healthcare infection control transfer form should be completed when a service user is transferred to another healthcare provider. This will help the spread of infection by informing anyone who is providing further support or nursing/medical care about that person's infection risk.

Everyone has a part to play in infection prevention and control and we must all work together to tackle and reduce the impact of infections.

It is important to remember that local infection prevention and control policies and guidance should be followed and all staff have a duty to be aware of, and comply with, their organisation's requirements.

No person should be harmed by a preventable infection.

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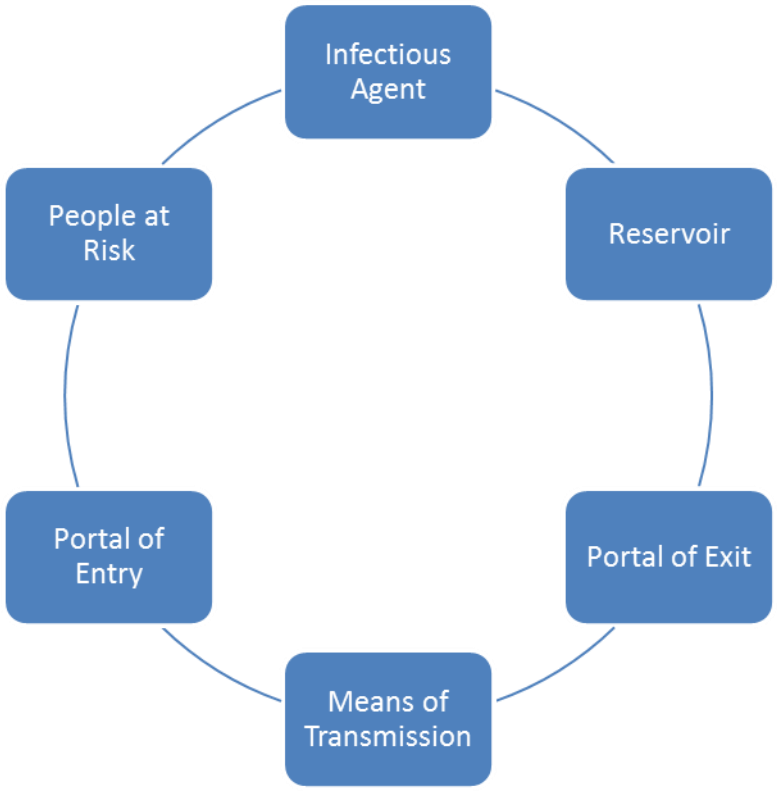
Healthcare Associated Infections

Healthcare associated infections (HCAI) are infections that develop as a direct result of healthcare intervention.

HCAIs can occur anywhere that healthcare is provided, eg hospitals, care homes, in a service user's own home, dental surgery and health centre.

An infection occurs when micro-organisms (germs) enter the body and cause damage. These micro-organisms can come from a variety of sources, and often enter the body through invasive medical devices, for example a urinary catheter.

Some can reach the bloodstream (Bacteraemia), causing serious or life threatening infection.



The 'chain of infection'

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The spread of micro-organisms from their source to a person is frequently referred to as the **chain of infection** - made up of six links. Each link represents one of the six elements required to spread infection.

Each link of the chain must be present for an infection to occur.

To break the chain requires removal of just one of the six links. With good infection prevention and control practice (standard precautions) applied at all times and in all health and social care settings, a link in the chain can be broken which will prevent the spread of infection.

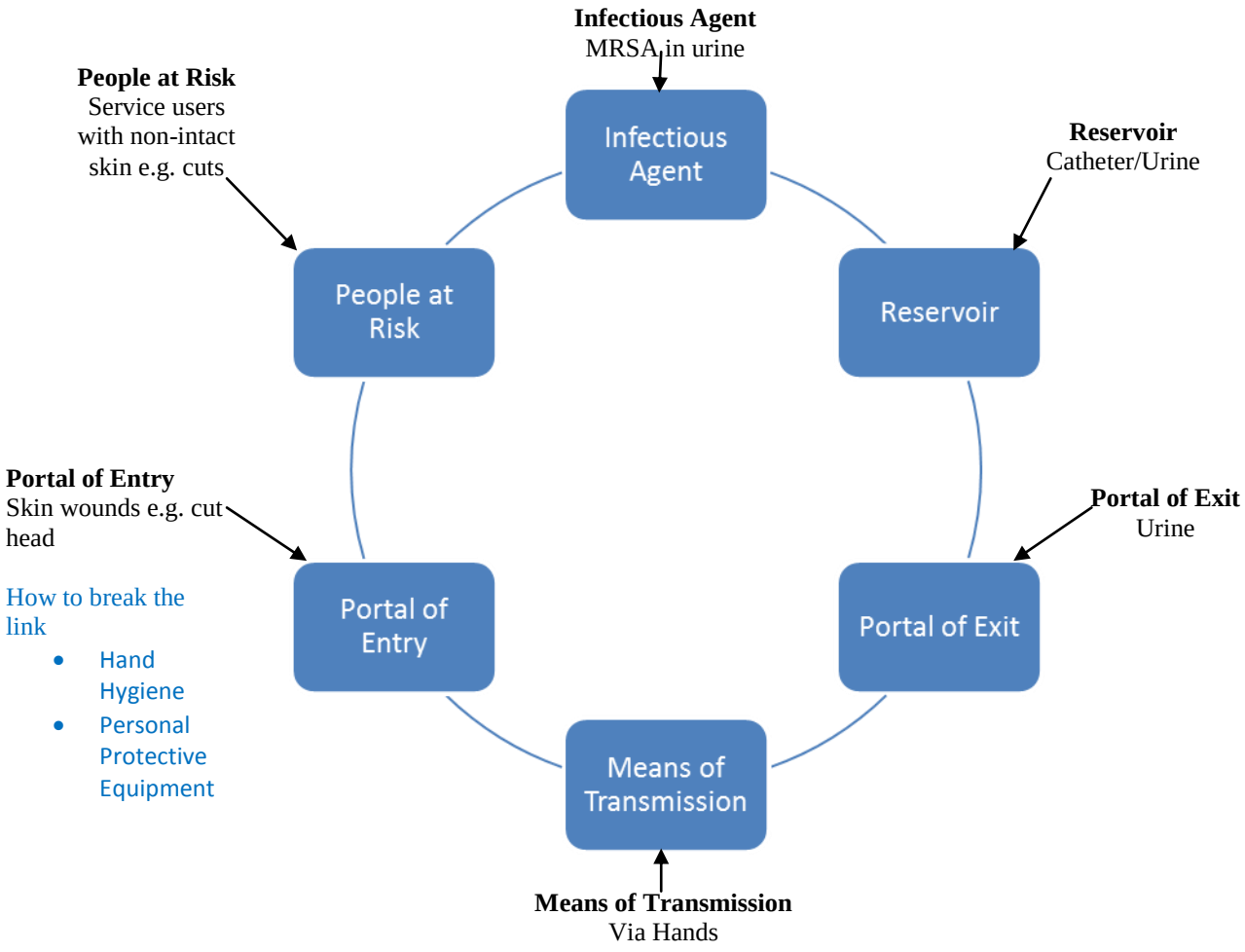
Infectious agent	Micro-organisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi) e.g. Clostridium Difficile, MRSA, Norovirus.
Reservoir	A reservoir for micro-organisms (where the infection comes from) e.g. people, animals, food, contaminated equipment or surfaces.
Portal of exit	The way in which micro-organisms leave the body e.g. coughing, sneezing, diarrhoea, blood.
Means of transmission	The way in which micro-organisms are transmitted e.g. hands, equipment, airborne, injection, and ingestion.
Portal of entry	The way in which micro-organisms enter the body e.g. mouth, nose, urinary tract, exposed wounds, broken skin, mucous membranes, needle stick injuries.
People at risk	A person's susceptibility to infection is determined by their age, well-being, level of immunity, invasive devices and any medical interventions.

Chain of infection example: How MRSA can be spread

Mrs A aged 85, has a urinary catheter and has MRSA in her urine. A healthcare worker empties the catheter bag and does not wash her hands after removing her gloves and apron. She then transmits MRSA to Mr B when cleaning a cut and applying a plaster.

Three days later Mr B is very unwell and is admitted to hospital with MRSA bacteraemia- a life threatening blood stream infection.

How to break the chain of MRSA infection



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