

# How do you get an infection?

## What you need to know to protect yourself!

Germs live both inside and outside the human body. Not all germs are bad. Infections happen when “bad” germs enter your body or when other germs go where they are not supposed to be. There are many good germs that help our bodies stay in balance and actually work to build our immune (or protection) systems. However, the bad germs are the cause of illnesses like the flu.

Germs live everywhere. You can find germs in the air; on food, plants and animals; in soil and water — on almost every other surface, including your body.

You cannot see germs with your eyes. You would need a microscope.

Knowing how germs work can help you avoid infection. If you do get an infection it’s important for your healthcare team to know what type of germ is causing the infection. They can then determine the right treatment for your type of infection.



**The three main types of germs that are the biggest cause of infections in kidney patients are:**

- **Bacteria** – Responsible for many infections in kidney patients. Examples are infections in your blood called “staph” or “strep,” pneumonia, and for peritoneal dialysis patients, infections in the belly called “peritonitis.”
- **Viruses** – Most often known for causing colds and the flu as well as gastrointestinal problems.
- **Fungi** – Not as common in causing infections but can cause an infection under a dressing or in a peritoneal dialysis patient’s catheter.

## How do germs get into my body to cause an infection?

Since germs are everywhere, there are many different ways they can enter your body and cause an infection.

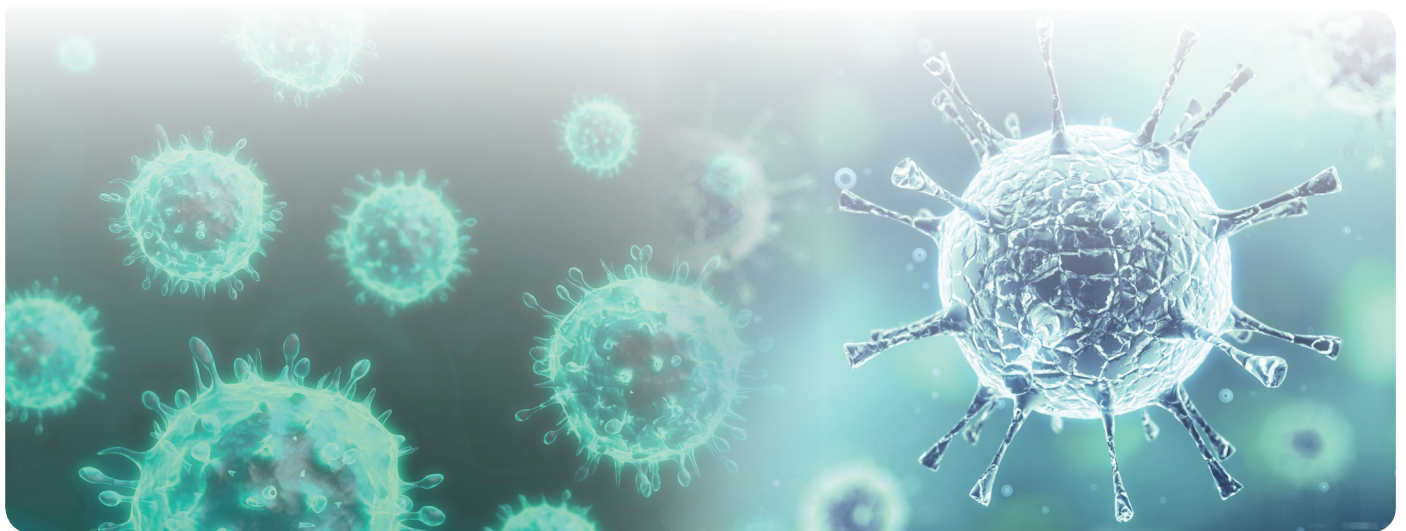
1. Germs can travel in the air on droplets of water or dust and enter your mouth and nose. For example, tiny droplets of water from a person’s cough can carry a germ into your body when you breathe in that air.
2. You can get germs by touching a surface that has germs on it or having close contact with someone who has an infection. If you then put your hand to your mouth to eat something, the germ can get into your body.

## As a kidney patient you have a greater chance of germs entering your body and causing an infection.

- Your body's immune system does not work as well as the immune system of a person who does not have kidney disease.
- Your type of treatment may put you at risk:
  - Hemodialysis patients could get a germ in their blood during their treatment.
  - Peritoneal dialysis patients could get a germ in their belly when fluids are exchanged.
  - Transplant patients take medicine to keep their transplant. These medications can lower their ability to fight germs.
- During your care a healthcare worker or another patient could spread germs by not following proper infection prevention procedures.
- Kidney patients with diabetes have a harder time healing, which can cause an infection.

Make sure you keep a current list of your healthcare team's contact information, including how they can be reached during off hours or holidays.

**TIP: Washing your hands frequently is the MOST important way to prevent infection.**



## End Stage Renal Disease National Coordinating Center

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