

Preventing Infection in Care

Infection Prevention and Control:
Care Homes for Older People and
Home Environment



Induction Programme

In all care settings preventing and controlling infection is everyone's business - protecting your own health, the safety of visitors and of course the wellbeing of the people you care for.

Some groups of people, including older people and people with certain health conditions, are particularly susceptible to infections – for them any infection at all can be very serious or even fatal.

Today the frequency of infections in care homes for older people is similar to that experienced in hospitals. Preventing and controlling infection is the responsibility of everyone - people who live within the home, visitors and staff.

It's vital that you as staff have the knowledge and skills to minimise the risk of infection and provide a safe, clean and healthy environment.

This short induction programme introduces you to the 10 standard infection control precautions – these are the practical steps that you can take to prevent infections.

These simple yet effective practices are about protecting the people you care for, visitors, family, friends, and of course yourself.

There are 10 elements to the standard infection control precautions providing international guidance on infection prevention and control. These have been implemented by NHS Scotland as a minimum standard and should be considered at all times when providing care. These are:

1. Hand hygiene (washing your hands properly and regularly)
2. Personal protective equipment (by this we mean disposable gloves and aprons)
3. Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette
4. Management of blood and body fluid spillages (this includes cleaning up spillages such as urine and vomit)
5. Occupational exposure management (this is about avoiding and protecting yourself from needles, scratches and splashes of body fluids such as blood)
6. Control of the environment (this includes cleaning of furniture and fittings)
7. Management of care equipment (this is the cleaning and maintenance of equipment such as hoists, wheelchairs)

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8. Providing care in the most appropriate place (you may need to temporarily separate an individual who has an infection to prevent it spreading)
9. Management of linen (safely managing clean and soiled towels, sheets and clothing)
10. Safe management of waste (correctly managing waste - waste can be anything from soiled bed pads right up to sweetie wrappers)

Washing your hands properly and frequently is the single most effective way of preventing the spread of infection.

Most of us are familiar with the use of hand gels – many of us will use them regularly in our day to day life – and we believe that after using them our hands are clean. They might not be as clean you think.

Think of all the things you do every day that you use your hands for and things like scratching your nose or touching your hair. Your hands are covered in micro-organisms, germs, even when you think they are clean and these micro-organisms can spread to anything or anyone you touch. The most effective way to clean your hands is by washing correctly with liquid soap and warm water.

By protecting your own health you'll help to protect others too. Check your hands for any cuts or abrasions – these should be covered with a clean waterproof plaster; nails should be kept short and free from nail varnish and nail extensions; jewellery should be kept to a minimum, no stoned rings, ideally just a wedding band. Bare your arms to the elbow and remove watches.

First make sure you have liquid soap in a dispenser and paper towels

1. Wet your hands with warm running water using a mixer tap if possible
2. Apply liquid soap from a dispenser and cover all your hands to create a lather
3. Rub your hands palm to palm
4. Rub the back of each hand with the palm of the other hand and interlace your fingers
5. Rub palm to palm with fingers interlaced
6. Rub the back of your fingers to the opposing palm with fingers interlocked
7. Rub each thumb in turn, holding it in the opposite hand using a rotational movement
8. Rub the tips of your fingers in the opposite palm in a circular motion

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9. Rinse your hands with running water
10. Turn off taps - if you have long- handled taps use your wrists, if not use a paper towel
11. Dry your hands thoroughly with a single use paper towel.
12. Dispose of the paper towel in the bin.

Once you have applied liquid soap washing your hands correctly will take about 15 seconds (It is the time it takes to sing Happy Birthday to yourself).

In some situations when your hands are not visibly soiled or dirty, you can use Alcohol Based Hand Rubs. However for this process to be effective you must follow the same process as you do when washing your hands with liquid soap and water, allowing them to air dry thoroughly. Again, this will around 15-20 seconds.

You may need to wash your hands a number of times throughout your working day – pause now and think of 5 occasions where you may need to wash your hands.

Although not exhaustive you will need to wash your hands:

- On arrival before you begin work
- Before and after helping someone with their meal
- Helping someone to go to the toilet
- When you have come into contact with any body fluids - urine, vomit,
- Before eating, handling or preparing food
- When you have taken off your disposable gloves
- Before you leave to go home, after all you don't want to take your work home with you

You should also encourage others around you to follow good hand hygiene.

Remember, washing your hands with liquid soap and warm water is the best way to prevent infection.

Personal Protective Equipment (often referred to as PPE) is equipment available to protect you and the people you care for in your day to day work and is a legal requirement of health and safety legislation. The most common types of personal protective equipment are disposable plastic aprons, disposable gloves and face protection.

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Personal Protective Equipment should be used when there is a risk of hands or clothing becoming contaminated with body fluids; such as vomit or blood – or when you need to clean an area or a piece of equipment.

Throughout your day you will need to assess each task you undertake and ask yourself if you need to use personal protective equipment.

Gloves come in a variety of sizes and should be close fitting – and should be changed for each person you are caring for and each new task. Don't carry gloves in your pocket and never wash them. In most situations where you require gloves you will also need to wear a protective apron.

Regardless of the task you have been doing, you should always assume that your gloves and apron have become contaminated and must be removed with care to avoid cross contamination. Gloves should be removed first, followed by apron then eye protection

- To remove your gloves you should grasp the outside of the glove with the opposite gloved hand; peel off
- Hold the removed glove in the gloved hand
- Slide the fingers of the un-gloved hand under the remaining glove at the wrist
- Peel the second glove off over the first glove
- Ensure safe disposal in correct bin

To remove your apron

- You should unfasten or break the ties
- Touching only the inside of the apron, pull the apron away from neck and shoulders lifting over head
- Fold or roll into a bundle
- Again ensure safe disposal in correct bin

Face protection is sometimes needed when there is a risk of splashing to the face.

You should always wash your hands after removing gloves and apron.

You may want to pause now and reflect on when you will need to wear personal protective equipment and where is it stored.

'Coughs and sneezes spread diseases!' A well known saying that is particularly relevant in care homes for older people.

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Colds and flu can spread rapidly – especially in environments where people live and work in close proximity, and can occur at any time of the year, not just during the winter months.

There are a few simple steps that you can take, and encourage the people you care for to take, to reduce the chances of becoming sick or passing colds or flu onto somebody else.

Always use disposable tissues to catch sneezes and cover coughs – pop the used tissue immediately into the bin and then thoroughly wash your hands.

Hankies that require washing or laundering are not ideal; instead you should try to make sure that people you care for and visitors have access to paper tissues and all are encouraged to follow good respiratory hygiene.

You may want to pause now and think how you would encourage someone to clean their hands after sneezing.

By spillages we mean:

- Blood
- Body fluids such as urine, vomit, faeces, sputum

Any spillage must be dealt with immediately to avoid any exposure to infection and to prevent accidents and is the responsibility of the person who witnesses or first discovers the spillage.

When dealing with spillages you should put on a disposable plastic apron and gloves.

For spillage of urine, vomit or faeces, place paper towels onto the spill to soak up the excess liquid before cleaning the area with hot water and detergent

For blood spillage a kit may be available to help you, but you should always read and follow the manufacturers' instructions.

Any waste should be discarded in the correct waste bin.

You may want to pause and find out what your local policy is and what equipment is available to you for dealing with spillages of body fluid.

This precaution is about protecting you from potentially harmful items or substances; sharps – such as needles and spillages such as urine or blood.

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You may from time to time be exposed to sharps such as needles, broken glass, razors indeed anything that may break the skin. We don't need to tell you that you need to be particularly careful both for your own protection and the protection of those you care for – but injuries from sharps are the most commonly reported incidents to occupational health.

Should an injury occur, do not suck the area - make the wound bleed gently under running warm water, wash with liquid soap, dry with a paper towel, then cover with a waterproof dressing and report immediately. You should ensure that the sharp is disposed of correctly.

The same procedure is followed if you have a bite that breaks the skin or blood splashes on an uncovered cut or abrasion.

Splashes from body fluids must be dealt with immediately. PPE should be changed immediately; and splashes to eyes or mouth should be rinsed with copious amounts of water.

You should follow local policies regarding reporting of accidents and incidents.

You should pause now to find out the policy for reporting accidents and incidents in your setting.

When we talk about the environment we mean; surfaces, floors, doors, blinds showers, toilets – basically furniture and fittings.

Dust and dirt allows micro-organisms to multiply so cleaning is very important within the care home to prevent the spread of infection.

Maintaining the cleanliness of the environment is not just the job of cleaning staff it's everyone's responsibility.

All establishments will have a system for cleaning – how often a room is cleaned and what procedures should be followed. There will also be a colour coded system in place for example the use of different colour cloths for cleaning different areas.

An environment that is clutter free and clean inspires confidence for those who live, visit and work there.

You might want to pause now to find out about the cleaning and colour coding arrangements in your setting.

Within the care home there are many different items of care equipment that require regular cleaning. These might include items such as commodes;

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wheelchairs, walking frames; feeding equipment and nebulisers. Keeping these items clean, fit for purpose and well maintained is everyone's responsibility to minimise the spread of infection.

Most items of equipment will have a specific cleaning procedure and an agreed schedule for frequency of cleaning – you should find out about this.

Some items, such as hoist slings, are normally for a named person and not used for any other individuals. These slings are usually laundered but always ensure you follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Commodes are used frequently in the care home environment. The contents of the commode pots are disposed of according to local policy and they must be thoroughly cleaned after each use

You may want to pause now to find out about the local policy for cleaning care equipment, maintaining care equipment, and the correct storage procedures.

Staff in care homes have a responsibility to provide the best possible level of care to all who live, work and visit the environment.

Where a person has symptoms of infection, such as vomiting and diarrhoea, or where there is a risk of an infection spreading, staff in care homes need to consider how to minimise that risk of the infection spreading.

It may be necessary to separate an individual from the rest of the home community in their own room or to a room on their own. This may be a frightening or frustrating experience and staff should work closely with family, friends and carers to ensure that all understand the importance of protecting the wellbeing of everyone.

Where there is a risk of infection spread you need to remember the importance of hand hygiene, personal protective equipment and keeping the environment clean.

Always remember to be aware that infections can spread rapidly and the importance of reporting any signs of infection to your manager as soon as possible.

You should pause now and think about how you might feel if you were separated from the people you lived with.

When we talk about safe management of linen we mean dealing with any cross contamination of clean and soiled items such as bed sheets, towels,

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duvets, as well as personal items such as clothing, but it doesn't include staff uniforms.

Used linen can harbour micro-organisms and these can be transferred through handling. It is important to understand the system for linen and laundry within your setting.

You should wash your hands before handling clean linen. You should also wear an apron and gloves where the linen is soiled with body fluids.

First remove the used linen – by rolling or folding the linen into a bundle – if there are faeces or vomit then this should be picked up using a paper towel and disposed off. Used laundry should not be put on the floor or shaken or soaked or rinsed but should be placed, as a bundle, in the correct laundry bag. There will be separate laundry bags for laundry that is used and laundry that is infectious.

You should remove your gloves and apron and wash your hands before handling the clean linen and completing the task.

The same principals of hygiene apply to personal clothing and any other laundry items.

You may want to pause now and find out about the system for managing linen and laundry within your setting.

By waste, we mean everything from incontinence pads to sweetie papers. Care homes for older people produce many different types of waste, some of which requires special handling and disposal.

The safe management of all waste by those involved in the handling transporting and processing of it is an essential part of health and safety and general good hygiene and is covered by legislation.

Your setting will use different coloured bags to manage this waste appropriately.

Some waste like tea bags, used tissues or sweetie papers can be disposed of in the routine domestic waste systems whilst other waste may need to be segregated as hazardous or special waste – these will need to be placed in the correct coloured waste bags.

You need to find out what the policy is in your setting and be aware of the colour coding system in place.

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All waste should be binned as soon as possible and bags should not be overfull. Hands should always be washed after handling used tissues.

For waste soiled with body fluids then extra care needs to be taken - you should always wear disposable gloves and apron when handling soiled waste and place it in the correctly coloured waste bags.

You should pause now to find about the arrangements for the safe disposal of waste in your setting.

This programme has given you an insight into the 10 standard infection control precautions. By following our guidance, being aware of local systems and procedures and by taking responsibility for infection prevention, you'll be helping to prevent infections in care.