Working together to PREVENT INFECTIONS

In our care setting, we promote Community Immunity* (CI), meaning it takes everyone to prevent infections and promote good health for all. CI is a commitment to protecting not only ourselves — but each other from illnesses that are caused by germs.

The evening news is often filled with stories about the spread of infections. Any time you have a large group of people living or gathering in one setting, there is an increased risk of spreading germs, which cause colds, flu, or Norovirus illnesses (stomach distress, diarrhea, vomiting) from one person to another. Think about cruise ships, day care settings, and schools for children. These places, like health care settings, need to take special care to prevent the spread of illness.

This means the usual antibiotics do not kill the bacteria, which changed to try to “outsmart” the antibiotics. Serious diarrheal infections from bacteria, called C. diff., have also been associated with antibiotic overuse. Doctors and nurses are aware of this. However, as an advocate, don’t be afraid to ask, “Why are you suggesting or ordering this antibiotic? Is it necessary?” Being thoughtful and smart about the use of antibiotics is called “antibiotic stewardship.”

SUMMARY
We want to encourage comfortable, safe stays and visits in an atmosphere of relaxation and healing. Please ask a staff member if you have any questions about how to prevent infections and how to be an active part of our Community Immunity*.
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ADVANCING EXCELLENCE IN LONG-TERM CARE COLLABORATIVE
https://nhqualitycampaign.org/
Germs are transmitted by sick persons (who may or may not show symptoms of being ill) in several ways:

- through droplets produced by coughs and sneezes
- on their hands and faces when touching you
- on surfaces touched by someone carrying the germ
- through fluids like saliva, spit, blood, urine, feces, and mucous that go out of the body

Germs enter healthy people and make them sick through:

- exposure to droplets from germ-containing particles
- breaks in the skin
- touching your hands, mouth, eyes after you have touched someone who is ill, or have touched the body fluids of the sick person
- touching hard surfaces that have body fluids on them

The spread of germs is called the *chain of infection*, and the goal is to break the chain to prevent spreading germs. Germs we are particularly concerned about in care settings and with elders are: Clostridium difficile (C. diff), Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), Influenza (flu) and the Norovirus.

**WHAT ABOUT GLOVES & MASKS?**

It is not necessary to wear gloves when visiting. Gloves are worn only when the person, usually a caregiver, may come in contact with body fluids, such as saliva, blood, urine and feces. This includes activities such as brushing teeth, cleaning or bandaging wounds, helping with toileting, and washing up. If you see a caregiver doing these tasks without these precautions, ask them why. A *Community of Immunity* calls for all of us to work together.

Masks are worn for 2 reasons:

1. To protect the other person from catching something from you that could be spread through the air and
2. To protect you from inhaling germs from the other person who is sick.

If there is a reason for you to wear a mask to protect yourself from getting sick, there will be a sign on the door listing the infection control precautions to follow.

**RESPONSIBLE USE OF ANTIBIOTICS**

Should antibiotics be used “just in case” of an infection? Antibiotics treat infections caused by a type of germ called bacteria. They are not effective against other germs, such as viruses that cause influenza (flu), viral pneumonia or the common cold. The overuse of antibiotics has created new problems, such as the antibiotic-resistant infection called Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).
Studies show that we touch our face around 15 times an hour and may touch close to 4,000 surfaces during a day. These are all activities that could be part of the spread of infection. When caring for each other, if we increase the number of times we clean hands, faces, and surfaces, we can break the chain of infection and shred the web of transmission.

Good hand cleaning is considered the basis of infection prevention. All caregivers need to clean their hands (also called performing hand hygiene) before and after they provide direct care. Visitors also need to clean their hands carefully before they enter and touch the person they are visiting and after they leave the room. If a sink is not handy, hand sanitizer is another good option. Many care settings have these available, and now many people carry a personal container of hand sanitizer with them. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are as effective as hand washing, except when the hands are visibly dirty, after using the toilet, or when certain germs are present, such as C. diff or Norovirus. With those germs, hand washing with soap and water is required.

It is kind and caring to offer a soapy, wet wash cloth or hand wipe when visiting a person in the care setting. They may need reminding and encouragement to clean their hands and face.

How many times a day do you wipe off your kitchen counter? When cooking or eating, it often is visibly dirty, so we do this routinely. What about hard surfaces in the care environment? They may look clean, yet still be a source of germs. Although housekeeping routinely cleans surfaces, it can be helpful to encourage residents, staff, and others to do this with a disinfectant wipe or spray in between the housekeepers’ actions. This is part of our Community Immunity* action plan.

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In addition to being a chain, the paths of infection are interwoven with the person, environment and caregivers. Think of it as a spider web with connections. What happens in one part of the web effects the whole web.

The hands and faces of all who work, visit or live in care settings are all part of the web. Objects that are touched or taken into and out of rooms are also potential “hot spots” for germs — think light switches, hand rails, remote controls, cell phones, tabletops, faucets, toilet handles, arms of chairs, and wheelchairs. Disinfect them, and the web is shredded.

How do we prevent the spread of contagious diseases when a lot of people are gathered together? There are many actions you can take to keep yourself and others healthy:

- **Clean your hands** with either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer for 15–20 seconds. With both methods, pay attention to between the fingers and the fingernails, getting all the surfaces of the hands.
- **Clean your hands** before visiting others, eating, and after you touch another person.
- **Encourage elders and others** to clean their hands, using soap and water, a sanitizer or disinfectant wipe, particularly if you observe them touching their face, mouth, or a dirty surface.
- **Cover your mouth** with your elbow when you sneeze and cough.
- **Don’t visit others or go to work** when you are ill.
- **Wash your hands** with soap and water after you use the bathroom or when visibly soiled.
- **Throw away used tissues** and clean your hands.
- **Get a yearly flu shot** to protect yourself and others.
- **Clean hard surfaces** with a disinfectant regularly.