

Helping to prevent infection

A quick guide for managers and staff in care homes



Delivering clean, safe care is essential to preventing infection

For people living in care homes, infections can be serious, and in some cases, life-threatening.

They can also make existing medical conditions worse. Regular contact with staff, other residents, family and friends and the shared living space all mean infection can easily be passed around. It is therefore vital to take the steps that can help prevent infection occurring.

Hand decontamination

Having clean hands is the most effective way of preventing infection from spreading. There are 5 important moments when you should clean your hands:



Adapted from 'My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene' – World Health Organization

To make it easier to wash your hands regularly, you should:

- Keep your arms bare below the elbow
- Before starting work remove wrist and hand jewellery
- Have short, clean fingernails without nail polish or false nails
- Cover cuts or grazes with a waterproof dressing



Decontaminate your hands with a handrub, except in the following situations when liquid soap and water should be used:

- When your hands are clearly dirty or may be contaminated with body fluids
- When you have been providing care to residents with vomiting or diarrhoea, even if you have been wearing gloves

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides an example diagram showing how to effectively [wash your hands or use handrub](#)

Personal protective equipment

This includes the use of gloves and aprons to protect you and reduce the risk of infection while providing care. Selecting which protective equipment to use will require an assessment of the task and the risk to both yourself and the resident.

- ✓ Wear each item only once
- ✓ If gloves are needed, put them on just before providing care and take them off straight afterwards
- ✓ Change gloves between different care tasks for one person, for example, personal care and care that involves non-intact skin
- ✓ Change gloves between care tasks for different people
- ✓ Dispose of all used items correctly (see below)



Sharps

This refers mainly to the use of needles for which staff will need to have the right training and skills. To help prevent infection:

- ✓ Handle sharps as little as possible and don't pass them from hand to hand
- ✓ Do not bend, break or recap a used needle
- ✓ Put used sharps in the right container straight away
- ✓ Don't use sharps containers for anything else
- ✓ Dispose of sharps containers when the fill line is reached, or every three months – whichever occurs first



Waste disposal

Healthcare waste, such as dressings and disposable clothing, can spread infection. To reduce the risk of this:

- ✓ Put waste immediately into the right colour storage, bag or container
- ✓ Make sure you know how healthcare waste must be labelled and stored
- ✓ Make sure residents and their friends and family understand how waste must be handled, stored and disposed of



Education and information

Residents and their friends and family can play a part in helping to prevent infection. Make sure they know about:

- The importance of clean hands
- How, when and where to clean their hands
- When to use handrub or soap and water
- What they can do to make sure care staff maintain clean hands



Further information

[Healthcare-associated infections: prevention and control in primary and community care](#) – NICE guideline

[Infection prevention and control](#) – NICE quality standard

The guideline and quality standard have been developed to complement the Department of Health's Code of practice on the prevention and control of infections. The code of practice and accompanying information resource cover a range of additional valuable information for managers and staff in care homes, including:

- Hygiene measures for staff, visitors and residents with respiratory infections
- When and how long to exclude staff from work when they have an infection or they have come into contact with an infection in their own home
- Assessing the need for isolation of residents because of infectious disease

[Code of practice on the prevention and control of infections](#) – Department of Health

[Care homes: infection prevention and control – an information resource](#) – Department of Health/Public Health England

[Infection control: break the chain \(You Tube\)](#) – University Hospitals, Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust,

[Residential adult social care: information for providers](#) – Care Quality Commission

[Essential practice for infection prevention and control](#) – Royal College of Nursing

This content has been co-produced by NICE and SCIE and is based on NICE's guideline on healthcare associated infections: prevention and control in primary and community care and quality standard on infection prevention and control.

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