

Partners in Quality Care

February 2026



Objectives:

- *Review definition of germs
- *Review infection control principles
- *Review the In-home aide's role in infection control

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References:

NC State-approved Curriculum
Nurse Aide I Training Program
MODULE B
Infection Prevention

NC DHHS Geriatric Aide Curriculum 2023 Module 4
Infection Control and Prevention

NCDHHS/DHSR/HCPEC |
Home Care Aide Curriculum |
July 2021
Module 7 – Infection Control and Prevention in the Home

<https://www.cdc.gov/infection-control/about/index.html> -
CDC Infection Control Basics

National Library of Medicine,
Medline Plus, Germs and Hygiene, 1/20/2026;
<https://medlineplus.gov/germsandhygiene.html#:~:text=The%20main%20types%20of%20germs,your%20eyes%2C%20nose%2C%20or%20mouth>

INFECTION CONTROL

Germs are a part of everyday life. Germs live in our air, soil, water and in and on our bodies. Some germs are helpful, others are harmful. An infection occurs when germs enter the body, increase in number and the body reacts. Only a small portion of germs can cause infection. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the term infection is defined as the state produced by the establishment of one or more pathogenic agents (such as bacteria, protozoans, or viruses) in or on the body of a suitable host and the word control is defined as a verb meaning to exercise restraining or directing influence over: regulate. This newsletter will discuss various types of infections and how to restrain or help regulate those infections and the principles of infection prevention and control. Infection control and prevention is important in all aspects of an In-home aide's role with their clients. Sources are places where infectious agents (germs) live (e.g., sinks, surfaces, human skin). Sources are also called reservoirs. As an In-home aide it is important to be aware of the sources where germs live during client care and in a client's home environment to help prevent and control infections. Transmission is a way germs move to the susceptible person. Germs depend on people, the environment and/or medical equipment to move in healthcare settings and would apply to home settings. Transmission is also called a pathway. As an In-home aide it will be important to be aware of points of potential transmission of germs such as from clients to the In-home aide and from the In-home aide to their clients. Items in the client's home environment can post a pathway of transmission and if a client uses any type of medical equipment such as bedside toilets, blood sugar monitors, or others, they are also types of potential germ pathways. There are different ways that germs can spread, including:

- Through touching a person who has the germs or making other close contact with them, such as kissing, hugging, or sharing cups or eating utensils
- Through breathing air after a person with the germs coughs or sneezes
- Through touching the feces (stool) of someone who has the germs, such as changing diapers, then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth; through touching objects and surfaces that have germs on them, then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- From mother to baby during pregnancy and/or childbirth
- From insect or animal bites; from contaminated food, water, soil, or plants

COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) is a disease caused by a virus named SARS-CoV-2. It can be very contagious and spreads quickly. COVID-19 most often causes respiratory symptoms that can feel much like a cold, the flu, or pneumonia. Anyone infected with COVID 19 can spread it, even if they do not have symptoms. Follow your agency policies for reporting symptoms of COVID-19 that you, or a client, or a client's personal caregivers experience to ensure appropriate screening, testing, treatment, and the use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves and masks. To prevent the spread of infections, you should regularly clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched often (e.g., countertops, doorknobs, faucet and toilet handles, light switches, remotes, and toys). Cleaning removes dirt, dust, crumbs, and germs from surfaces or objects. Disinfecting uses chemicals (disinfectants such as bleach and alcohol) to kill germs on surfaces and objects.

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Infection prevention and control principles include knowing how germs are spread, hand hygiene including handwashing and alcohol-based hand rubs, infection precautions, and the appropriate use of personal protective equipment as needed. Standard Precautions are the first of two levels to prevent/control infections; the basic tasks that health care workers must do to prevent and control spread of infection, *whereby all blood, body fluids, non-intact skin, and mucus membranes are treated as if they were infected*. Transmission Based Precautions are the second of two levels to prevent/control infections; specific tasks and measures that health care workers must do when caring for persons who are infected or may be *infected with specific types* of infections. Always wear gloves if you may come into contact with blood or any bodily fluids.

Examples of infections include:

- Urinary tract infection, including bladder infection and kidney infection
- Skin infection, including infected wounds and cuts
- Respiratory infection, including pneumonia, flu and the common cold
- Gastrointestinal infection, including stomach infection, intestinal infection, or food poisoning

A localized infection is an infection found in one part of the body and symptoms are limited to that one part of the body. An example is an infected finger (when a finger becomes infected, it may be red, painful, hot, puffy, with drainage). A systemic infection is an infection that affects an entire body part or entire body system. There are different types of symptoms including fever, chills, confusion, feeling tired, nausea/vomiting, and possibly symptoms that are specific to the entire body part or entire body system. An example would be a respiratory infection.

Ways to Protect Yourself and Others from Germs Include:

- When you have to cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or use the inside of your elbow
- Wash your hands well and often. You should scrub them for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to get between your fingers, and your palms. It is important to do this when you are most likely to get and spread germs:
 - Before, during, and after preparing food; Before eating food
 - Before and after caring for someone who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea
 - Before and after treating a cut or wound
 - After using the toilet
 - After changing diapers or cleaning up after a person who has used the toilet
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
 - After handling pet food or pet treats
 - After touching garbage
- Cleaning hands at key times with soap and water or hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to those around you. Soap and water work to remove all types of germs from hands, while sanitizer acts by killing certain germs on the skin. If soap and water are not available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in many situations. However:
 - Sanitizers do not get rid of all types of germs
 - Hand sanitizers may not be as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy
 - Hand sanitizers might not remove harmful chemicals, such as pesticides, and heavy metals like lead
 - Soap and water are more effective than hand sanitizers at removing certain kinds of germs like norovirus, Cryptosporidium (Crypto), and Clostridioides difficile (C.diff), as well as chemicals

INFECTION CONTROL

Viruses cause colds and the flu, and these viruses can be all around us, in the air we breathe, and on objects we touch. These viruses can be easily transferred as we share the air and touch many of the same objects such as doorknobs, pencils, light switches, and faucets. Germs can be transferred by people who do not seem to be sick themselves. Germs can be expelled into the air by sneezing and coughing. Covering one's nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing can prevent germs from being expelled into the air. Taking steps to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses when you are sick is a core prevention strategy to lower risk from respiratory viruses. Core prevention strategies are important steps you can take to protect yourself and others from respiratory viruses. This time of year, you hear about the spread of many sicknesses. A key word is spreading. Whether it be respiratory illnesses such as influenza (flu), COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) or Norovirus which is the leading cause of vomiting and diarrhea, and foodborne illness in the United States, along with other types of illnesses, we all have a part to play in preventing the spread of these illnesses. The chain of infection is the foundation for spreading and preventing an infection. For an infection to occur and spread, each of the six links of the chain must be present. By breaking any link in the chain, a new infection can be prevented.

- ✓ Microorganisms: disease producing, also called pathogens (germs) - virus, parasite, fungus, bacterium
- ✓ Reservoirs are where the germs live or hide, examples are animals, insects, humans, objects, surfaces, equipment, or anything in the environment including food, water, and even the air
- ✓ Portal of Exit- examples of how germs exit the human body are through blood from a wound, semen and vaginal secretions from the reproductive tract and genitalia, tears from tear ducts, urine, feces, mucous discharge from the respiratory tract, drainage from open wounds and across the mother's placenta to the fetus
- ✓ Mode of Transmission- Once the germ exits its hideout (reservoir), it must find a way to move to its next victim. There are many routes for germs to be transmitted to another. The most common and frequent modes of transmission are direct contact, indirect contact, and droplet contact. Direct or physical contact occurs when the infected person transfers the germ causing the infection to another. Indirect contact includes the spread of infection through eating or drinking contaminated foods, water, or beverages, touching contaminated care products and personal care equipment, utensils, pets, equipment or feces, or any other inanimate object. Droplet contact can happen when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks within three feet of another
- ✓ Portal of Entry- Once a germ leaves its hideout and finds a way to travel, a portal of entry is necessary. Germs can enter the body through breaks in the skin, through eyes, nose, or mouth, through the digestive tract, through the urinary and reproductive tracts, the respiratory system, and the circulatory system. Points of exit and entry are the same
- ✓ Susceptible Host-If the host's defenses are strong, it may stop the germ's invasion. If not, the host becomes susceptible to the infection, unable to fight off the germs, and the germs enter the body. The chain of infection now has the potential to continue to spread since the germ has found a new reservoir. Factors affecting host susceptibility (e.g., other diseases or medical conditions, very young or elderly, malnourished).

Key Points:

Infection control and the prevention of infections must be a regular part of an in home aide's work. Handwashing, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and safe food preparation can reduce your risk of getting infected with a pathogen (germ) and can help you keep your client's safe from infections. Follow your agency's guidelines on infection control including what personal protective equipment (PPE) is required in your clients' care including gloves and when necessary, masks or other types of PPE. OSHA requires your agency provide appropriate training and PPE to workers. Be sure to attend the airborne and bloodborne pathogen training provided by your agency and know your agency policies on reporting illnesses and exposure to bloodborne pathogens such as needlesticks. Go to this website to see the CDC information on *When and How to Clean and Disinfect Your Home*: <https://www.disinfecting.cdc.gov/hygiene/about/when-and-how-to-clean-and-disinfect-your-home.html> for key tips on cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting.