Infection Control in the Home

These are general guidelines on infection control for family and friends providing care in the home. This information is not a substitute for instructions given by your doctor.

HOW INFECTIONS ARE SPREAD

In order for an infection to spread, the following must be present:

- A germ - virus or bacteria.
- A place for the germ to live - person, animal, plant, food, soil or water.
- A susceptible host - a person who does not have resistance (immunity) to the germ.
- A way for the germ to enter the host:
  - Direct contact - shaking hands, hugging, etc.
  - Indirect contact - when food, water, bandages or other substances contaminated by the germ enter the host.
  - Droplets - such as those produced by a sneeze or cough which can travel several feet in the air.
  - Tiny dust particles that travel long distances in the air.
- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or cough into your elbow.
- Dispose of used tissue in the nearest waste receptacle.
- Clean hands with soap and water, an alcohol-based rub after touching respiratory secretions or handling contaminated objects.

CLEANLINESS IS THE KEY!

- Everyone must wash hands before handling or eating food, and after using the toilet, changing a diaper, touching pets, money, uncooked food, coughing, sneezing, blowing nose, touching nose, eyes or mouth.
- Caregivers must wash hands before and after giving care: cleaning wounds or carrying for catheters, changing bandages or handling soiled linens, and giving mouth care or cleaning private parts.
- Wash hands properly - use lots of warm, running water and soap to lather hands and wrist. Scrub for at least 15 seconds including under the fingernails.
- Rinse well with hands pointing down to allow germs to flow into sink. Dry with clean paper or cloth towel. Use lotion for dry skin.
- Stock up on cleaning supplies: disinfectants, separate sponges for bathroom and kitchen, paper towels, utility gloves (replace when cracked, torn or start to peel).
- Use bleach safely - **never** mix with other cleaning products!
- Take care of your cleaning supplies - toilet brushes, mops and sponges can breed germs. Soak them in bleach and water for 5 minutes after each use.

HOME CARE

- Provide good ventilation in the home.
- Be cautious with pet care - do not let those with weakened immune systems touch bird dropping, fish tank water or cat feces (change litter daily).

Bathroom:

- Provide liquid soap - bar soap can become a home for bacteria.
- Change towels and washcloths daily to prevent possible fungal infections.
- Change toothbrushes often and store them separately in a clean dry place.
- Disinfect the toilet.
- Clean the tub, shower and sink with standard cleaning products.
- Mop the floor once a week with a standard cleaner.
- Do not share personal items such as razors, toothbrushes, glasses, combs, brushes, towels and washcloths.

Kitchen:

- Store food carefully: refrigerate leftovers promptly in covered containers. Throw out stale or spoiled food. Clean the inside of refrigerator weekly. Keep refrigerator set at 40°F or less and freezer at 0°F or less. Thaw foods in the refrigerator or microwave. Serve foods at proper temperature.
- Take care with meat: never eat raw. Make sure it cooked to the appropriate temperature and cook eggs until they are firm.
- Wash fruits and vegetables under running water.
- Use separate cutting boards, plates and utensils for raw and cooked foods.
- Keep work surfaces clean.
- Use a clean spoon each time you sample food while cooking.
- Wash dishes and utensils in hot soapy water, air dry or use a dishwasher.
- Do not share forks, cups or spoons during meals.
- Do not pour used mop water down the sink. Pour it down the toilet instead.

Doing laundry

- Wear gloves if laundry is visibly soiled.
- Change linens once a week or when soiled.
- Do not shake soiled linens - you may send germs into the air.

Dispose of contaminated wastes

- Place dressings, sanitary or incontinence pads, diapers, or gloves in plastic garbage bags for disposal.

KNOW THE SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF INFECTION

- Inflamed skin-skin that is red, hot, swollen or has a rash.
- Fever or chills.
- Pus-green or yellow drainage from a wound.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Persistent diarrhea.
- Cough or sore throat.
- Painful urination.

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