

Caregiving in
The Comfort of Home®

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU ... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Hygiene – Keeps You & Others Healthy

It's not possible to clean or disinfect *every* surface you have contact with, but keeping hands clean is the first line of defense for keeping infection causing germs from reaching your mouth, nose, or eyes, where they can make you and then others, sick.

Proper handwashing requires soap and water. By rubbing, soap breaks down the grease and dirt that carry most germs. Washing your hands for at least 20 to 45 seconds with soap and water—about the time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” through twice reduces germ counts by up to 99%. Rub hands together vigorously and scrub between fingers and under nails. **Lather, rinse, repeat.**

We all should know the importance of washing after using the toilet, yet less than 50 percent of people actually do it—and almost no one does it properly.

When to wash your hands: Always after toileting, after handling raw foods, whenever you've been in contact with anything or anyone “suspicious,” and periodically throughout the day. Our bodies naturally carry germs on them. Most of these germs are harmless, and some are even essential to our health. However, germs from other sources, such as raw meat, can also survive on hands, and these can be

easily transferred to other surfaces, increasing the risk of cross-contamination. Because our hands are in frequent contact with our eyes, nose, and mouth, it's easy to see how dirty hands spread germs and illnesses, everything from the common cold, flu and food poisoning.

As important as it is to properly wash your hands, it's equally important to **dry them correctly** too. The bacteria and viruses that are left on your hands after even a good washing thrive on moist skin, so you are at risk of spreading germs until you dry your hands thoroughly after each wash.

Hot-air hand dryers are not always the best way to dry hands, primarily because most people give up before their hands are really dry. Do not wipe damp hands on your clothes to dry them. The most effective way of reducing hand-borne bacteria is to dry thoroughly washed hands on clean paper towels.

Hand sanitizer gels can be used to kill germs, but they should *not* always replace handwashing. Hand sanitizers can build up on skin, so wash your hands the regular way—with soap and warm water—after every fourth use.

Source: Centers for Disease Control



Tip Frequently touched surfaces such as shopping cart handles or ATM keypads are teeming with germs. Carry your own hand wipes to wipe away germy surfaces.

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Norovirus

Norovirus, often called the stomach bug, is the leading cause of *food-borne* illness in the United States and infects about one in 15 Americans each year. It spreads very easily through tiny particles of vomit or feces, usually by contaminated food, water, surfaces, or close contact with someone who is sick. Produce and shellfish can carry the virus, and infected people can spread it while preparing food.

The virus can survive on surfaces for up to two weeks and is commonly spread in places where people are in close quarters, such as nursing homes, day cares, and cruise ships. Symptoms usually appear 12 to 48 hours after exposure and include vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, and fatigue. Sneezing and coughing are more likely signs of respiratory illness.

Most people recover within three days, though fatigue may last longer. The **main danger is dehydration**, especially for children under 5 and adults over 65. Signs of dehydration include dizziness, confusion, unusual sleepiness, and little or no urination. Seek medical care if symptoms last more than three days, if you cannot keep liquids down for 12 hours, or if there is blood in the stool.

There is *no specific treatment* for norovirus. Rest and drink plenty of fluids, including water, broth, ice chips, or electrolyte drinks. Bland foods such as bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast may help.

To prevent infection, wash hands often with soap and water, disinfect surfaces with diluted bleach, wash produce, and cook shellfish thoroughly. People who are sick should avoid preparing food or caring for others for at least two days after symptoms end.

Source: What to Know About Norovirus: Symptoms, Spread and More - The New York Times

Pets Naturally Carry Germs

Even healthy-looking pets carry bacteria in their gut or on their body. Pet food, treats, and items like bowls, toys, and crates can also become contaminated and spread illness to pets or people.

Cleaning removes dirt and germs using soap or detergent and *disinfecting* kills germs using chemicals.

When to *clean*:

- Pet bowls — After every use (wet food) or daily (dry food and water)
- Pet beds, blankets, and habitats — Weekly
- Pet toys — Monthly

When to *disinfect*:

- Items that contact poop or pee (e.g., litter boxes)
- When your pet is sick
- If you own rodents, reptiles, or amphibians — monthly at minimum
- If anyone in the household has a weakened immune system, is under 5, over 65, or pregnant.

Source: CDC

Taking Care of Yourself— Germs Spread Through Eyes

Germs can spread through the eyes in several ways:

- ◆ **Direct contact** — *Touching your eyes with unwashed hands is one of the most common ways. Your fingers pick up bacteria and viruses throughout the day, and rubbing your eyes transfers them directly to the eye's surface.*
- ◆ **Water exposure** — *Swimming pools, lakes, and oceans can contain bacteria, parasites, and other microorganisms cause infections like conjunctivitis (pink eye).*
- ◆ **Droplets** — *Respiratory illnesses like colds and flu can spread when an infected person sneezes or coughs nearby and the droplets can land directly on your eyes.*
- ◆ **Shared items** — *Sharing towels can transfer bacteria and viruses from one person to another.*
- ◆ **Good hygiene habits** — *such as handwashing and **avoiding touching your eyes** — are very important.*

Source: 4 Things Ophthalmologists Wish You Knew About Your Eyes; NYT

Live Life Laughing!

Why did the mouse take such a long shower?

Because he wanted to be squeaky clean.



Inspiration

*If you have compassion but
no wisdom, a good heart
might do the wrong thing.*

—Jet Li

Memory Care - Handwashing

Handwashing is almost always an issue in dementia. Guide the person in your care to the sink and tell her step-by-step how to wash her hands. Explain to her what you are going to do next. Watch the flow of water so it is not too strong, as it can be frightening for a person with dementia.

Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

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To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

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SAFETY TIPS— Preventing Odors

Germs thrive in moisture, warmth, darkness, oxygen, and leftover food particles. When these conditions exist, unpleasant odors can quickly develop. To reduce strong smells, keep all storage spaces clean, dry, and regularly disinfected. Place an open container of finely **ground coffee under the bed** to absorb lingering odors. Add several **drops of mouthwash to bedpans** after cleaning for a fresher scent. **Cotton balls soaked in mouthwash** may also be placed in bowls around the room. Spray a **light mist of white distilled vinegar mixed with eucalyptus or peppermint essential oil** to freshen stale air. **Vanilla extract on cotton balls** can help remove persistent odors from containers and cabinets. Empty trash daily, wash linens frequently, open windows for ventilation, and **use baking soda in waste bins or shoes**. If odors remain, consider using electrical air purifiers. Regularly checking drains, carpets, and curtains can prevent hidden moisture and unpleasant smells from developing.

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“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

Q U I C K Q U I Z

Protect those you care for from colds, flu and infections by keeping the air around them clean. The simplest way to do this is to encourage everyone to cover their nose and mouth for every cough and sneeze. Answer True or False to the question below.

1. Washing your hands for at least 20 to 45 seconds with soap and water can reduce germ counts by up to 99%.
T F
2. The most effective way to dry hands and reduce hand-borne bacteria is to use clean paper towels.
T F
3. Hand sanitizer gels can build up on skin, so you should wash with soap and water after every fourth use.
T F
4. Watch the flow of water from the faucet so it is not too strong, as it can be frightening for a person with dementia.
T F
5. Norovirus is the leading cause of food-borne illness in the United States, infecting about one in 15 Americans each year.
T F
6. Sharing towels will not transfer bacteria from one person to another.
T F
7. People who are sick with norovirus should avoid preparing food or caring for others for at least two days after symptoms end.
T F
8. Sneezing and coughing are the most common symptoms of norovirus infection.
T F
9. Touching your eyes with unwashed hands is one of the most common ways germs spread through the eyes.
T F
10. Pet bowls that contain wet food should be cleaned after every use.
T F

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____