

Infection Control Guide

Caregivers are uniquely positioned in infection prevention. Unlike hospitals with structured infection-control programs, caregiving environments—especially homes—often lack formal policies, making a standardized checklist valuable.

The burden of infections in care:

- Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) occur in both facilities and homes, leading to preventable hospitalizations.
- Older adults face increased risks from respiratory viruses, urinary tract infections, and skin/wound infections.
- Family caregivers often provide medical-level tasks (wound care, catheter management, medication administration) without formal training, increasing exposure risks.

Core Infection Control Practices (CDC Framework)

The CDC highlights several **non-negotiable, evidence-based practices** that every caregiver should apply:

1. Hand Hygiene

- Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds when visibly soiled or after bathroom use.
- Use alcohol-based hand rubs (60–95% alcohol) when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Perform hand hygiene **before and after** every caregiving task.

2. Standard Precautions

- Assume all blood, body fluids, secretions, and excretions may contain transmissible pathogens.
- Wear gloves when contact is likely.
- Add gowns, masks, or eye protection if splashes or sprays are anticipated.

3. **Transmission-Based Precautions** (used when illness is known/suspected):

- **Contact:** Gloves/gowns for draining wounds, diarrhea, or resistant bacteria.
- **Droplet:** Surgical mask for influenza, RSV, COVID-19.
- **Airborne:** N95 respirator for TB, measles (rare in homes—professional consultation advised).

4. **Respiratory Hygiene & Cough Etiquette**

- Cover coughs/sneezes with tissue or elbow.
- Wear a mask if symptomatic.
- Increase ventilation in rooms (open windows or use HEPA filters if feasible).

5. **Environmental Cleaning & Disinfection**

- Clean high-touch surfaces daily (doorknobs, light switches, phones).
- Disinfect using **EPA-registered products** after illness or contact with body fluids.
- Follow label instructions for contact (“dwell”) times.

6. **Vaccination & Illness Policies**

- Stay current with CDC/ACIP immunizations (flu, COVID-19, Hepatitis B, MMR, Tdap, etc.).
- Caregivers should **not work while ill** with contagious diseases.

State Guidance Highlights

While CDC provides national recommendations, **states may impose additional rules** for caregivers, home health aides, and agencies.

- **California Department of Public Health (CDPH):** Requires home-care agencies to have written infection-control plans, and caregivers must complete annual infection-prevention training. Specific COVID-19 and respiratory virus precautions remain in effect.
- **New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH):** Mandates training for aides on standard and transmission-based precautions, including bloodborne pathogen safety, cleaning protocols, and respiratory hygiene.
- **Texas Health and Human Services (HHS):** Requires licensed home-health agencies to maintain policies consistent with CDC and OSHA standards, including hand hygiene, sharps safety, and PPE.
- **Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA):** Requires caregiver training on infection prevention, including safe food handling and waste disposal.

Practical advice: Caregivers and families should always check their **state health department website** for updated training requirements, outbreak alerts, or vaccination mandates.

Infection Control Checklist for Caregivers

A. Hand Hygiene

- ☐ Alcohol-based hand rub available in care area
- ☐ Soap, running water, and paper towels stocked
- ☐ Caregivers trained in proper technique
- ☐ Perform hand hygiene before/after tasks

B. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- ☐ Gloves in multiple sizes available
- ☐ Masks (surgical and/or N95) accessible
- ☐ Gowns/aprons for high-risk tasks
- ☐ Eye protection when splash risk is present

C. Environmental Cleaning

- ☐ Daily cleaning of high-touch surfaces
- ☐ EPA-registered disinfectant used after illness exposure
- ☐ Laundry handled with minimal shaking, hot water cycles
- ☐ Waste disposed in lined containers; sharps in sealed containers

D. Respiratory Hygiene & Ventilation

- ☐ Tissues and masks available for symptomatic persons
- ☐ Covered cough/sneeze signs posted in care area
- ☐ Increase ventilation (open windows, air purifiers)

E. Medication & Sharps Safety

- ☐ Dedicated clean area for medication preparation
- ☐ Sharps container available and not overfilled
- ☐ Never recap or reuse sharps
- ☐ Proper disposal arranged (per state rules)

F. Vaccination & Health Maintenance

- ☐ Caregivers up to date on CDC/ACIP vaccines
- ☐ Annual influenza vaccine documented
- ☐ COVID-19 boosters per current guidance
- ☐ Stay-home-when-sick policy in place

G. Documentation & Training

- ☐ Infection-control training completed annually
- ☐ Daily log includes infection-related notes (fever, cough, wounds)
- ☐ Monthly supply check performed
- ☐ State-specific requirements reviewed quarterly

Implementation Tips for Caregivers

1. **Post the checklist** in a visible place (e.g., kitchen, care station).
2. **Train every helper**, including family and respite caregivers, on key infection-control steps.
3. **Audit monthly**: assign one person to check supplies and practices.
4. **Prepare for illness**: keep a “sick-day plan” (isolation area, extra masks, disinfectant stock).
5. **Engage providers**: bring your care log and checklist to medical appointments for feedback.

A clear, practical infection-control checklist equips caregivers with tools to prevent disease spread in vulnerable populations.