



Pet Partners

Touching Lives, Improving Health

Why Infection Control?

In all places where humans and animals live there are bacteria, viruses and other organisms. Some of them are beneficial but some transmit disease to either/or humans and animals. We are all familiar with rabies vaccinations being necessary because both our domestic pets and humans can be affected by this severe and deadly disease. We need to be just as proactive to prevent infections of any kind.

Even the cleanest of homes and hospitals have organisms that potentially can make people or animals ill. It is virtually impossible to kill all organisms in an environment where people and animals live and work. This is why we must consistently use infection control techniques to protect our clients, our animals and ourselves.

PREPARING FOR VISITS:

- Most health care facilities encourage the use of infection control methods. If yours does not, **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE** for informing the facility of the necessity of doing so and informing them of the basic techniques recommended by Pet Partners.
- The team must be impeccably groomed. The handler's clothing should be in accordance with facility policy, simple washable clothing, no open toed shoes, a modicum of jewelry since dirt and infective organisms can collect and multiply in the crevices of jewelry,
- Human fingernails should be cleaned before and after the visit as they collect dirt and infectious agents. The use of a nail brush with soap and water is best.
- Animals should be bathed within 24 hours of the visit with particular attention paid to feet and anal areas. Dog's feet should have excess hair trimmed away between the pads, this is done to help prevent the animal from taking little in or out of a facility on its feet. Toenails need to be short and smooth. Animals need to be kept clean until the visit takes place, so double check your animal before you leave to visit. A good brushing is always good before leaving to visit.
- Check the animal's ears, eyes, and teeth which should be brushed.
- For animals who cannot be bathed, use a product that will rid your animal of dirt and dander. It should be noted that some facilities will not accept an animal that cannot be bathed. If you cannot bathe your animal, please be clear about that with any facility you hope to visit.

- Be sure any product you use on your animal is safe for them and any client who will come in contact with it.
- Check that your visiting bag is well supplied. It should never be put down in a facility and should be washable.

WHILE VISITING:

- As a handler, you should cleanse your hands (by washing or using hand sanitizer) before and after each client.
- Your clients should cleanse their hands (again by washing or using hand sanitizer before and after any physical interaction with your pet.) Unless you are not going near the client, there is always the possibility that your pet will be touched.
- It is wise to check with each facility for the preference of sanitizer to use. Some will have a preference.
- If a client is likely to put sanitizer in their mouth (someone with dementia or a small child) it is preferable for hands to be washed, however, sanitizing hand wipes can be used.
- It is always appropriate to ask a staff member to assist with hand hygiene for the client as it can be difficult to help some clients to cleanse their hands properly.
- If the animal is to touch any part of the client's bed, chair or clothing, putting any part of its body on these objects, the animal must have a CLEAN towel or sheet FROM THE FACILITY between it and the client's bed, chair or clothing. The protective towel or sheet is only to be used for ONE CLIENT and then folded in upon itself and placed directly into the dirty laundry container.. We do not take materials into the facility to use in this manner.
- Pet Partner teams DO NOT enter rooms or areas where there is PRECAUTION SIGNS POSTED. You never enter a posted area of precaution as there is a virulent infection or infections present and entering puts you and your animal partner at risk.
- Avoid getting close to anyone with an open wound. You may visit clients with a bandaged wound as long as there is no drainage visible. The teammates must avoid contact with any bodily fluid when visiting as many infectious disease processes are spread through bodily fluids.
- Avoid visiting clients who have diarrhea. You may need to ask staff to tell you which clients to avoid for this reason. There are several illnesses which both humans and animals can experience that are spread through diarrhea fluids. For this reason, if you think there has been any risk of exposure, you should wash your animal's feet after the visit with soap and water and rinse well.
- Animals should not lick clients and especially not on the face. Animals have developed MRSA (rarely) because the MRSA bacteria of infected individuals was spread from licking or because an individual with MRSA kissed an animal and passed the bacteria on to them.

- Teammates should avoid visiting if either have an open wound or are ill. If there is another animal in the household that is ill, do not visit.
- It is wise to have an agreement with the facility that it will notify the Team if there is an illness, such as flu, spreading in the facility. When that is true, it is wise not to visit to prevent contacting the illness and helping it to spread into the community.

AFTER THE VISIT:

- A Soap and Water wash of your Dog's feet, if they walk, if there is any possibility of exposure to fecal borne illnesses, is necessary. Gravity pulls everything to the floor in any environment. An animal's feet are likely to pick up organisms if they are present. Some handlers prefer to wipe off their animal's coat with disinfectant wipes as an extra precaution but this IS NOT sufficient for feet as some bacteria are not killed by the normal sanitizing fluids used in wipes.
- Cleanse your clothing and your animal's vest/scarf on a regular basis. They are meant to be washed and reused.

These are BASIC TECHNIQUES that are appropriate in all medical settings. You should automatically adopt them and use them consistently.

If you find a facility uncooperative, please work with the facility so they both understand (and they should!!) and accept these minimum protections for their clients, your animal and you. If necessary, go to person in the facility, usually a nurse, who has the facility responsibility for infection control. You can ask who this person is and contact them as this issue is very important. If a facility is not cooperative it is usually because they feel it is expensive or it will take more time or use up their linens. A facility that is not willing to cooperate with these basic measures may not be the facility to visit.

In many instances, facilities will have additional techniques they require you to use. By all means do so, this will be especially true if visiting clients whose immune systems are depressed and who are much more susceptible to infection.

Infection Control is imperative because team members should not be responsible for the spread of disease in any setting. And, we want our teams to STAY HEALTHY!!