

# Hygiene Handbook for Domestic Helpers

Household and Personal Hygiene  
and Basic Infection Control



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# Introduction

Personal and household hygiene is part of our daily routines. However, do you know if we are using the correct methods? Do you know how to keep our homes clean?

This handbook provides practical guidelines for domestic helpers to keep ourselves and home clean so as to reduce the spread of infections, such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infection. All along, MRSA infection has been affecting hospitalised patients mostly, however, in recent years, more and more cases have been found in healthy individuals. MRSA infection is transmitted through direct contact with wounds, discharge and soiled areas, usually via hands which may then contaminate other body parts, other persons or items. Maintaining personal and household hygiene can effectively prevent the disease.

Please note that household environment may vary from family to family. The suggestions in this handbook are just for reference. Domestic helpers should always communicate with the employers and work together to keep clean to reduce the risk of infections.

## Self Care, Care for Household Members and the Sick

**Hygiene and health begins with the individual. Hence, self care is very important.**

### Personal Hygiene

- Take bath daily
- Wash hair daily or on alternate day
- Keep nails short
- Change clothing and underwear daily
- Clean clothing and bedclothes regularly
- Do not share toothbrushes, cosmetics, razors, towels, combs, hair brushes and other personal items



### Hand Hygiene

Maintaining hand Hygiene is the single most effective way to prevent the transmission of infection.

### Good Hand Hygiene Behaviours:

- ✓ Wash hands before eating or preparing food
- ✓ Wash hands before and after caring for sick household members
- ✓ Wash hands after using the toilet
- ✓ Wash hands after sneezing or coughing
- ✓ Wash hands after touching pets



### Avoid:

- ✗ Touching pets before or during eating
- ✗ Nose-picking, touching pimples, biting nails etc

# Self Care

## Hand Hygiene Technique



## Respiratory Hygiene



Maintain cough manners since coughing may generate droplets and spread infections.

- Cover nose and mouth with tissue paper while sneezing or coughing
- Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin
- Wash hands thoroughly with liquid soap after sneezing or coughing
- Put on a surgical mask while having respiratory symptoms

## Wound Care

Wounds may be contaminated by germs. Treat them with care.

- Cover skin lesions or wounds with waterproof adhesive bandages
- Keep the skin lesions or wounds clean and dry, and change the dressing materials regularly or whenever it is wet or dirty
- Seek medical advice if the wound develops signs of infection such as redness, swelling, pains and oozing
- Do not take any medications or antibiotics without medical advice and prescriptions



# Care for Household Members

- Wash hands before feeding
- Wash hands after handling diapers
- Do not share food or eating utensils
- Avoid close body contact, such as kissing the baby



# Care for the Sick

If feel unwell, domestic helpers should inform their employers to arrange medical consultation. They should also take adequate rest.



## Fever Management

- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid alcohol, tea and coffee
- Have plenty of rest, including bed rest
- Measure body temperature regularly
- Seek medical advice if fever persists
- Take medication to relieve fever according to doctor's prescriptions

## Proper Use of Antibiotics

Antibiotics are effective drugs for treating bacterial infections, but they are not 'magic drugs' and cannot cure common colds and influenza. Antibiotics may also cause side effects and promote the growth of antibiotic resistance bacteria. Hence, antibiotics must be used properly.

- Do not take antibiotics without doctor's prescriptions
- Follow doctor's instructions to take antibiotics
- Never share antibiotics with others or leave them for later use



While taking antibiotic which is necessary to cure your infection, the antibiotic also kills the normal bacteria in your body and predisposes you to acquire more resistant bacteria. Therefore, you should enhance personal hygiene:

- Practise frequent hand hygiene
- Eat or drink only boiled items
- Disinfect and cover all wounds
- Wear mask if you have respiratory infection symptoms



## Environmental Cleansing

Since germs can survive in the environment for a period of time, it is vital to observe environmental hygiene. Cleansing should be strengthened whenever there is any household member suffering from communicable diseases.

## General Cleansing

- Clean all surfaces at least daily with water and detergent, or disinfectants if necessary
- Clean frequently touched area such as door knobs or telephone more often subject to the frequency of use
- Start cleaning from the cleaner areas and progress to the dirty areas
- Wash hands after finishing the cleansing work
- Carry out pests control regularly



## Handling of Linens and Clothing

- Handle, transport and store clean linens or clothing separately from the dirty ones
- Handle dirty linens or clothing with care and minimise agitation to prevent environmental contamination
- Change bed linen regularly

## Handling of Vomitus, Excreta or Blood

- ▶ Consider wearing disposable gloves if the cleaning involves contact with body fluids, such as respiratory secretions, urine, faeces etc.



- ▶ Use highly absorptive materials to clean up the contaminated surfaces first



- ▶ If the surface is contaminated with vomitus or excreta, disinfect with 1 part of diluted household bleach (5.25%) in 49 parts of water, leave for 15 to 30 minutes and then rinse with water
- ▶ If the surface is contaminated with blood, disinfect with 1 part of diluted household bleach (5.25%) in 4 parts of water, leave for 10 minutes and then rinse with water

## Food Hygiene

**It is vital to handle food carefully as taking unhygienic food can cause enteric infections.**

## Food Storage

- Keep food at proper temperature and pay attention to expiry date. Refer to food label as appropriate



- Store cooked food in upper compartment of the refrigerator; and raw food in lower compartment



- Store raw and cooked or ready-to-eat food in separate containers with cover to prevent cross contamination

# Food Handling



- Wash hands thoroughly before handling and serving food, and after handling raw food



- Handle raw and cooked or ready-to-eat food separately (e.g. using separate knives and chopping boards) to prevent cross contamination



- Cook food thoroughly before consumption to ensure food safety. Drinking water should be boiled or properly filtered

- If necessary to keep leftover food, refrigerate it properly and consume it as soon as possible. Inspect the food before reheating; reheat thoroughly before consumption
- Discard any spoilt food items



# Household Hygiene

**A clean environment can make your home more comfortable and reduce the spread of communicable diseases.**

## General Environmental Cleansing

- Clean all surfaces at least daily with water and detergent, or disinfectants if necessary
- Clean frequently touched area such as door knobs or telephone more often subject to the frequency of use
- Start cleaning from the cleaner areas and progress to the dirty areas
- Wash hands after finishing the cleansing work
- Carry out pests control regularly

## Ventilation

- Open the window and allow more fresh air to come in, in particular when any household member has symptoms of respiratory infection
- Clean air filters regularly
- Clean air-conditioning systems according to the manufacturer's instructions
- Remove potential water sources that may encourage fungal growth, especially stagnant water in ventilation systems



## Removal of Stagnant Water

- Drain stagnant water underneath flower pots and from the air-conditioners properly
- Change water in the vases regularly
- Clean the vases properly after changing of water



## Hygiene in Kitchen

- Keep the kitchen utensils clean
  - Clean ventilation fan and range hood regularly
  - Clean and defrost the refrigerator regularly and keep the proper temperature inside (i.e. at/below 4°C inside the refrigerator and at/below -18°C inside the freezer)



## Hygiene in Toilet

- Clean toilet at least once a day
- Wipe the rim, seat and lid of the toilet bowl with detergent, rinse with water and then wipe dry
- Clean floor drain outlets at least once a week to prevent putrid air and insects in the soil pipes from entering the premises
- Pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet regularly (about once a week) so as to maintain the water column in the pipe as water lock to prevent the spread of germs
- Do not alter the pipelines and the U-shaped water traps without authorisation



## Handling of Linens and Clothing

- Handle, transport and store clean linens or clothing separately from the dirty ones
- Handle dirty linens or clothing with care and minimise agitation to prevent environmental contamination
- Change bed linen regularly



## Wastes Disposal

- Cover garbage bins with lids
- Wrap up rubbish properly before discarding it into garbage bins
- Empty garbage bins at least once daily
- Tie up rubbish bag securely before disposal
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling garbage



## Care for Pets



- Keep children away from areas that may contain pet or other animal excreta
- Clear pet litter box or tray daily
- Pick up and dispose of pet faeces properly
  - Wash hands thoroughly after touching pets or handling their excreta

## Practical Tips

### Dilution of Bleach and Safety Issues

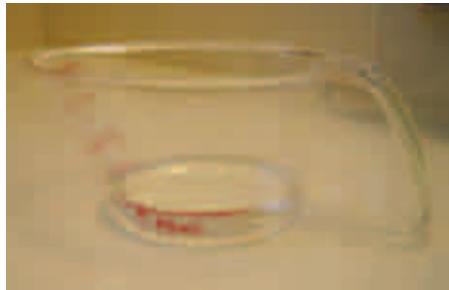
Bleach, an aqueous solution of sodium hypochlorite is an effective household disinfectant. However, improper handling of bleach can reduce its effectiveness or cause accidents. We should handle it carefully and properly.

### Procedures of preparing and using diluted bleach

- Open windows to ensure good ventilation
- Put on protective gear (e.g. rubber gloves & apron) when diluting or using bleach as it irritates the skin, mucous membrane and airway.



- Use cold water for dilution as hot water breaks down the active ingredient of bleach and reduces its effectiveness
- Based on the bleach used contains 5.25% sodium hypochlorite, the recommended concentrations and methods for dilution for different situations are as follows:
  - ▶ For general household cleaning - 1 part of bleach in 99 parts of water (e.g. mixing 50 ml of bleach with 4950 ml of water)
  - ▶ For surfaces or articles contaminated with vomitus, excreta and secretions - 1 part of bleach in 49 parts of water (e.g. mixing 100 ml of bleach with 4900 ml of water)
  - ▶ For surfaces or articles soiled with blood - 1 part of bleach in 4 parts of water (e.g. mixing 100 ml of bleach with 400 ml of water) is used to disinfect
- Use a tablespoon or measuring cup to measure the amount of bleach accurately
- Make adjustments to the amount of bleach added if its concentration of sodium hypochlorite is above or below 5.25%



- Rinse disinfected environment and articles with water and wipe dry
- Soak cleaning tools in diluted bleach for 30 minutes and then rinse thoroughly before reuse
- Finally, wash hands with liquid soap and dry hands with a clean towel or paper towel

## Special notes:

### Avoid

- Avoid use bleach on metals, wool, nylon, silk, dyed fabric and painted surfaces
- Avoid use together or mix with other household detergents as this reduces its effectiveness and causes chemical reactions

### Storage

- Bleach releases toxic gas when exposed to sunlight. Store it in a cool and shaded place out of reach of children
- Bleach breaks down with time. To ensure its effectiveness, purchase recently produced bleach and avoid over-stocking
- For effective disinfection, use the diluted bleach within 24 hours after preparation as it breaks down with time if left unused

### First aid

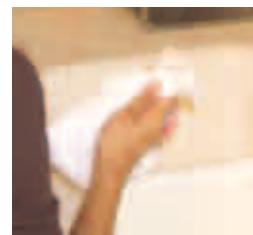
- If bleach gets into the eyes, immediately rinse with water for at least 15 minutes and consult a doctor

## Hand Hygiene

Clean hands with liquid soap and water when visibly soiled or likely soiled with body fluid. When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70-80% alcohol-based handrub is also effective.

### Clean Hands with Liquid Soap and Water

- Wet hands under running water
- Apply liquid soap and rub hands together to make a soapy lather
- Away from the running water, rub the palms, back of hands, between fingers, back of fingers, thumbs, finger tips and wrists. Do this for at least 20 seconds
- Rinse hands thoroughly under running water
- Dry hands thoroughly with a clean cotton towel or a paper towel
- The cleaned hands should not touch the water tap directly again. The tap may be turned off
  - ▶ by using the towel wrapping the faucet; or
  - ▶ after splashing water to clean the faucet



- Please note:
  - ▶ Never share towels
  - ▶ Dispose of used paper towel properly
  - ▶ Store personal towels properly and wash them at least once daily. Preferably, prepare more towels for frequent replacement



## Clean Hands with Alcohol-based Handrub

- Apply a palmful of alcohol-based handrub and cover all surfaces of the hands
- Rub the palms, back of hands, between fingers, back of fingers, thumbs, finger tips and wrists
- Rub for at least 20 seconds until the hands are dry

## Wearing a Mask

In general, it is appropriate to use a surgical mask. Always perform hand hygiene before putting on a mask, and before and after taking off one.

- The mask should fit snugly over the face:
  - ▶ Face the coloured side of the mask outwards with the metallic strip uppermost
  - ▶ Position the elastic bands or strings properly to keep the mask firmly in place
  - ▶ Mould the metallic strip to the bridge of the nose
  - ▶ Extend the mask to cover the chin
  - ▶ Ensure nose, mouth and chin are fully covered
- Avoid touching the mask once it is secured on your face. If you must do so, perform hand hygiene before and after touching the mask
- When taking off the mask, avoid touching the outside of the mask as this part may be covered with germs
- Dispose of the used mask in a lidded rubbish bin
- Change the surgical mask at least daily. Replace the mask immediately if it is damaged or soiled





## Handling of Vomitus and Other Soiled Objects

- Consider wearing disposable gloves if the cleaning involves contact with body fluids, such as vomitus, spits, urine, faeces, blood etc.
- Use highly absorptive materials to clean up the soiled surfaces first
- If the surface is soiled with vomitus, spits, urine or faeces, disinfect with 1 part of household bleach (5.25%) in 49 parts of water
- Clean the soiled area extensively, from outside to inside at least 1 metre from the soil. Leave for 15 to 30 minutes and then rinse with water
- If the surface is soiled with blood, disinfect with 1 part of household bleach (5.25%) in 4 parts of water, leave for 10 minutes and then rinse with water

## Conclusion

To protect our health and prevent diseases, we should always keep close watch on personal and environmental hygiene. All employers, domestic helpers and household members should share the responsibility to carry out the hygiene practices. Let's join hands to keep home clean and enjoy a happy, healthy life.

A corresponding VCD of this booklet is available for sale at the health education centres of the Department of Health.

The order form can be downloaded from:

[http://www.cheu.gov.hk/eng/resources/pdf/form\\_sale.pdf](http://www.cheu.gov.hk/eng/resources/pdf/form_sale.pdf).

For enquiry, please call 2572 1476 or 2417 6505.

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