



Infection Preventive Control (IPC) Topic: Infection Control in Therapy Departments

Intro: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that "healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) are a threat to client safety¹." Any staff member in any outpatient therapy department (PT, OT, speech, recreation etc.) needs to have a thorough understanding of how to protect their clients—and themselves—from spreading infection in any health care setting. "Data describing risks for HAIs are lacking for most ambulatory settings, [and] numerous outbreak reports, have described transmission of bacteria, mycobacteria, viruses, and parasites."²

What is the risk? Germs can spread through contact with hands, environmental surfaces, respiratory droplets, and equipment used routinely during therapy sessions. When we know where germs live, we can take steps to help keep ourselves and our clients healthy. Cleaning our hands and surfaces properly are very important steps. If not handled correctly, shared medical devices can spread germs from one patient to another.

Hand Hygiene:

Staff should always clean hands before and after therapy sessions.

- Staff should clean their hands before dispensing bulk lotions to medication cups for use. This is to prevent bacteria growth in bulk lotions and medications.
- Clients should also clean their hands before and after therapies.
- If clients are sick with respiratory illnesses, therapies should be postponed until they are feeling better.
 - If therapies can't be postponed, personal protective equipment (PPE) and cough etiquette should be used. Surgical masks should be provided if needed.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
 - Throw used tissues in the trash.
 - If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands.
 - Remember to immediately clean your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- PPE that can be used during therapies for protection of self and client can include:
 - gloves
 - gowns
 - eye protection

- well-fitting surgical mask and or respirator

Cleaning and Disinfection: Equipment such as walkers, crutches, and hand railings should be cleaned and disinfected after each use. Disinfection with the proper solution and appropriate observation of contact time is essential to kill germs. Refer to disinfectant label for specifics as each product varies⁹.

Single use items:

- Dedicate lotions or massage creams to one client. Do not “double dip” into bulk lotions or creams for multiple clients.
- TheraBands and putties/clay should be dedicated to one client and then kept at bedside.
- Tens units need disposable electrodes, and the unit needs to be disinfected as written in the manufacturer’s instructions for use.
- Clean and disinfect all shared equipment prior to use with another client (e.g., wheelchairs, walkers).
- Gait belts should be dedicated to one client; when the client is finished, they should be laundered properly before they are used on another client or soiled.

Water Therapy:

Hydrotherapy involves the use of water for soothing pains and treating certain medical conditions. It is used by some facilities to help with burns, pressure ulcers, lesions, amputation, and arthritis. Germs in water can spread to surfaces and people and cause harm. For the health and safety of everyone, it is important to ensure that the water that is used in hydrotherapy is safe and clean.

- Potential routes of infection caused by contaminated water include accidental ingestion of the water, breathing in sprays and aerosols from the water, and allowing wounds to come in direct contact with the water².
- Drain and clean hydrotherapy equipment (for example, tubs, whirlpools, and whirlpool spas) after each client use, and disinfect equipment surfaces and components by using an EPA-registered product in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. Even when using tub liners, proper disinfection and cleaning is essential.
- Disinfect equipment surfaces and components, e.g., trolleys and chairs that encounter water from a patient or tank, using an EPA-registered product in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions.

Summary: Physical, Occupational, and Speech Therapies play a crucial role in holistic client care. It is essential for staff and clients to have clean hands before and after participating in therapy activities. To prevent the spread of germs, cleaning and disinfecting the environment and equipment needs to be done correctly and often during therapies.

For more information on recognizing risk in therapy departments and related Project Firstline materials, see References below:

- 1) <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/settings/outpatient/outpatient-care-guidelines.html>
- 2) <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/prevent/Outpatient-Settings-Policy-Options.pdf>
- 3) <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/other/medical/hydrotherapy.html#:~:text=Guidelines%20for%20Environmental%20Infection%20Control%20in%20Health%20Care,sodium%20hypochlorite%20to%20the%20water%3A%20...%20More%20items>
- 4) <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/projectfirstline/healthcare/print.html>
- 5) <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/projectfirstline/videos/EP9-PPE-LowRes-New.mp4>
- 6) <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/projectfirstline/videos/EP21-Hands-LowRes.mp4>
- 7) <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/pdf/projectfirstline/Healthcare-Germs-Environment-Devices-508.pdf>
- 8) <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/pdf/projectfirstline/Healthcare-Germs-Environment-WaterAndWetSurfaces-508.pdf>
- 9) [How to Read a Disinfectant Label \(cdc.gov\)](#)