

## UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

Home care workers, both Caregivers and those doing home visits, often care for people who are not feeling well and may be exposed to illnesses which may be communicable (given to others) – they may get ill themselves if they're exposed to or vulnerable to the Clients' illnesses. Using universal precautions is generally accepted to be the best way to avoid being exposed to disease when one touches any Client's body fluids like sweat, saliva, feces, urine, pus or primarily blood.

It is recommended that universal precautions be used when handling any Client's body fluids. **Universal precautions means not touching any body fluids without disposable gloves and wearing disposable gloves when giving personal care. In some illnesses like tuberculosis it means wearing a mask or goggles. It will not always be known or disclosed to you whether a particular Client has a communicable disease which you could potentially contract by failing to utilize disposable gloves when handling sweat, saliva, feces, urine or primarily blood.**

Diseases which can be given to others include hepatitis A (food handlers), HIV/AIDS, herpes, cytomegalic virus (CMV), rubella, impetigo, ringworms, tapeworms, pinworms, shingles, measles, flu, chicken pox, tuberculosis, meningitis, various viral and bacterial infections, etc. All Caregivers must submit a Fitness to Work Statement signed by a healthcare practitioner concerning clearance from communicable diseases like tuberculosis and hepatitis prior to receiving referrals and then periodically thereafter. If a Caregiver has certain communicable diseases like hepatitis or tuberculosis, under public health law the Caregiver is obligated by law to tell the Office about that disease.

Diseases like HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B and C are **bloodborne diseases** and are not known to be communicable except through sexual intercourse or blood-to-blood contact between open skin wounds or cuts. Unless an HIV/AIDS Client voluntarily chooses to disclose his/her positive HIV/AIDS status and agrees that the information is not private, the company cannot share the information with a Caregiver. If a Caregiver has positive HIV/AIDS s/he may continue to work so long as s/he remains physically able to work and there are Clients willing to accept a referral of such a Caregiver. The company is obligated by law to disclose known HIV/AIDS status to Clients prior to referral and they have the right to refuse such a referral. No names will be disclosed to a Client prior to the Client advising whether it will accept a referral of an HIV/AIDS positive Caregiver. Information about a Caregivers positive AIDS/HIV status is protected health data and shall not be shared with others without a need to know. The Office does not always know when Clients have a communicable disease which Caregivers could possibly get if s/he does not use universal precautions. Since Clients do not always tell us they have a communicable disease, it is good, safe, professional practice for Caregivers to always use universal precautions.

Here are suggested practices to follow:

- There is no touching of broken skin, open wounds or changing of dressings involving packing or drainage. Leaky dressings can be reinforced if necessary, but licensed home health agency personnel are responsible for open or draining wound dressing changes.
- Use **disposable tissues** for sneezes, coughs or when one needs to blow one's nose is a good way to capture and throw away the germs. Unexpected sneezes or coughs can be caught in the elbow rather than the hands.
- Clients are asked to have **gloves and anti-bacterial hand soap** to use in the home, many Caregivers carry their own supplies with them as well.
- **Hand washing** is an excellent way to prevent the spread of infection and germs. Hand washing should always include the use of a nailbrush. Hand washing should occur after giving personal care to the Client, before

handling any food, and always after using the toilet, coughing into the hand or blowing the nose. Washing for the duration of “Happy Birthday” is long enough.

- Client bedding or clothing should be kept away from your body. If the bedding or clothing is soiled with feces, urine or blood are handled with gloves, are thoroughly rinsed before being placed in the washer and are washed separately from other clothing with hot water, detergent and bleach unless there is specific Client direction to do otherwise.
- Soiled disposable briefs should be wrapped prior to being thrown out and should be stored in a closed container, preferably outside the house.
- **Bathroom and kitchen** surfaces are cleaned with separately stored materials – bathroom cleaning sponges are never used to clean in the kitchen, and floor cleaning sponges or cloths are never used to wipe counters. Disposable cleaning cloths are often the best way to clean kitchen and bathroom areas.
- Using **disinfectant sprays** and liquids to clean can also help keep things germ and odor free.
- We ask Caregivers to call the Office if they will not work with Clients who may have communicable diseases (whether the Client tells us about the disease or not); the Caregiver has a bad cough, the flu or other disease they may give to a Client; or if they think they may be particularly vulnerable to a disease the Clients may have (like chicken pox, CMV, rubella, etc.).
- Encourage all Caregivers to refer any question concerning scope of services to the Office. They **are not licensed** or authorized, in addition to other things which involve medical judgment: to administer medications, adjust oxygen flow, suction airways, change wound dressings, flush catheters or tubes, give injections, handle feeding or medication pumps, broken skin in any way nor intravenous lines or equipment. It does not matter if someone teaches them how, tells them it is “OK” or otherwise leads them or you to believe they can do these things. If it is not on the Client service plan or Caregiver Activity record – they cannot do it when working with Aaron's Home Care Clients.

There are specific information/fact sheets available to the servicing Office covering many of the communicable diseases you run into. [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) (Center for Disease Control) and [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov) (National Institute of Health) are excellent and reliable information sources for communicable disease and other health conditions respectively.

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Caregiver Signature

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Date