

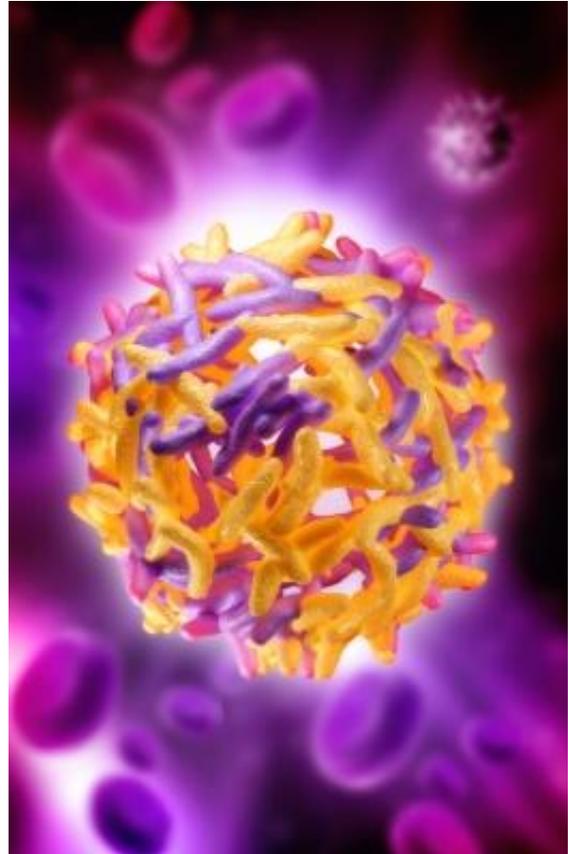
Standard Precautions at Home

By Kate McCarthy

Mention the term, Standard Precautions to anyone in health care and they immediately know what is meant. A Standard Precautions class is a basic requirement for anyone who deals with providing health care, even on the most basic level. It is information that reduces the risk of transmission of microorganisms from many sources of infection. In layman's terms using Standard Precautions helps stop the spread of germs.

For those in the health care industry, the assumption is that all people could potentially transmit infection, and so all interactions dealing with blood, body fluids, secretions and excretions are dealt with in a precautionary way. This built in assumption of treating everyone as a potential virus carrier is based on the fact that between 40% – 90% of people have viral hepatitis and other infectious diseases and are completely unaware that they are spreading it around.

These precautions are specifically designed for Doctor's offices, clinics, hospitals, extended and long-term care facilities as well as home health care and community-based care settings. Yet the basic principles of Standard Precautions apply to everyone at home too. By following these common sense practices people keep a barrier between infectious substances and their skin, eyes and inside of nose and mouth. By making Standard Precautions a natural part of life, people can protect themselves from catching all manner of illnesses. This is especially true with our elderly population and the



“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

family members who provide care for them. They need to be extra careful during cold and flu season.

Basic Standard Precautions at home

It seems silly to say it, but the core of Standard Precautions is washing your hands. We pick up germs easily by touching people and things and then easily transmit those germs our own eyes, noses and mouths and so get ourselves sick. Most people understand that and try to make a practice of washing their hands after using a public restroom or before they eat. Yet the majority of people don't wash their hands properly to really get rid of germs.

To properly wash hands, use warm water and soap and thoroughly scrub the hands for a full 20 seconds. Don't forget to wash between fingers, back of hands and under fingernails. The most commonly missed spots are the tip of the index finger and the joint between the thumb and hand. Rinse hands in warm water for at least 10 seconds. Dry hands completely with a paper towel and then use that towel to turn off the water from the sink.

When soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer gel to kill the germs you have come in contact with. Most medical professionals will do a combination of the two preventions with each contact they have with every patient. It doesn't hurt to have a travel sized sanitizer with you where ever you go.

The use of latex gloves is another measure to help prevent the spread of infectious diseases, especially when having to deal with another person's body fluids. They can be purchased at any medical supply store or pharmacy and are an inexpensive means of protection. Be sure to wash hands before and after using gloves. Also don't reuse gloves or touch your face while wearing them.

The wearing of a mask is common in health care, especially if the provider is feeling under the weather. This can be easily practiced at home to help prevent the spread of germs through sneezing or coughing.

When cleaning up body fluids, be careful not to get any of the fluid in your eyes, nose, mouth or any open sores on your hands or arms. Clean and disinfect all surfaces, such as toilets, counter tops, floors or bed linens. Throw away all rags or paper towels used for cleaning in a sealed plastic bag. Mops used to clean up body fluids also need to be cleaned and disinfected. Use one-part bleach to 10-parts water to wash and rinse the mop, wring it out and hang to dry completely. Be sure to wash hands again after cleaning all supplies.

The basic common sense of Standard Precautions will go a long way to preventing illness from infectious diseases. By using Standard Precautions at home everyone has a better chance of getting through cold and flu season without getting sick.



HomeAid Health Care
Helping Hands at Home



MedAid Staffing
Helping Hands at Work

Kate McCarthy is the Executive Director for HomeAid Health Care and MedAid Staffing. HomeAid provides services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. MedAid provides certified and trained Caregivers to local facilities to help with their short or long term staffing needs. HomeAid and MedAid work closely with Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their Residents since 1999. Together the three family owned and managed companies provide comprehensive care for the elderly in the Fox Valley area of Wisconsin.