

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.

Delta Society Pet Partner's policies and procedures require that handlers and pets comply with recommended procedures on hand washing and pets being clean before entering facilities. Any pet or person that isn't feeling well, or is having any symptoms of illness, should **NOT** enter a facility.

Both volunteers and pets are at risk of picking up pathogens from a healthcare or public facility. Policies are designed to reduce the risk of disease transmission, but the risk to all individuals, humans and pets, can never be zero.

Careful attention to hygiene and other Pet Partner Team protocols is critical to reduce the risk of transmission of pathogens such as MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus -- rarely) and Clostridium, a group of anaerobic bacteria. Clostridium is a large genus containing gram-positive bacteria, some capable of causing diarrhea and vomiting in dogs.

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, Inform 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, and 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 to help prevent the animal from taking little in or out of a facility on its paws. Toenails need to be short and smooth. Animals need to be kept clean until the visit takes place. Double check your animal before you leave to visit. A good brushing is helpful before leaving to visit.
- Check the animal's ears and eyes for cleanliness. The animal's teeth should be brushed. Be sure your animal is not sick or stressed. This is not conducive to enhancing well-being for them or others.

- For animals who cannot be bathed, use a healthy dry product that will rid dirt and dander. 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 the animal and client. This includes staff at facilities you visit. They should know this, but it is your responsibility to remind them.
- Check that your visiting bag is well supplied. Do not put it down on the floor in a facility. Ask the facility if they have somewhere you can hang your bag or if they have an empty locker for you to use. If necessary, place a towel on a chair. Remember not to bring valuables with on your visit. Do bring a gentle, curry brush, clean towels for beds and laps, antibacterial soap, wipes, healthy treats for your partner, and an extra leash. No-one can walk your dog without you in the lead.
- Articles in the American Journal of Infection Control, Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association and other sources document that animals fed raw protein diets may shed significantly higher amounts of pathogenic bacteria than those fed cooked proteins. Indications are that this may put some people at risk, more than prepared or cooked home-made diets. [Delta Society's Policy](#) states that animals eating raw protein foods are precluded from participating in the Pet Partner's program. Please refer to Delta's Raw Protein Diet Policy.

While visiting, these basic techniques are appropriate in all medical or therapeutic settings. You should automatically adopt them and use them consistently:

Cleanse your hands (by washing or using hand sanitizer) before and after each client. When washing your hands, please remember these important steps:

- ◆ Be prepared and plan your visit.
- ◆ Be sure you and your pet are relaxed, not stressed or ill.
- ◆ Wet hands first with water (avoid HOT water; lukewarm is best)
- ◆ Apply 1-2 teaspoons of soap to hands
- ◆ Vigorously rub hands together for at least 15 seconds.
- ◆ Cover all surfaces of the hands and fingers.
- ◆ Rinse Hands with water and dry thoroughly with a paper towel
- ◆ Use a clean paper towel to turn off water faucet.

Your **clients should cleanse their hands** 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. After a visit wipe their feet (paws) and face with an antibacterial wipe. If concerned, when in doubt, wash them when you get home.

- It is wise to check with each facility for the preference of sanitizer to use.
- 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. Sanitizing hand wipes or soaps, common in facilities, right in the rooms, and on side-walls, can be used.
- When in doubt, ask for staff assistance. It is always appropriate to ask for assistance with hand hygiene for the client, as it can be difficult to help some clients cleanse their hands.
- If the animal is to touch any part of the client's bed, chair or clothing, the animal must have a **CLEAN** towel or sheet, preferably 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, then placed directly into the dirty laundry container. Try to only use the linens provided by the facility.

- Teams, **DO NOT** enter rooms or areas where there are **PRECAUTION SIGNS POSTED**. There is a virulent infection(s) present. Entering puts you and your animal at risk. When in doubt, consult with a staff member.
- 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 teams must avoid contact with any bodily fluid when visiting. Many infectious disease processes are spread through bodily fluids.
- Avoid visiting clients who have diarrhea. Ask staff to tell you which clients to avoid for this reason. Several illnesses that humans and animals can experience are spread through diarrhea fluids. If you think there has been any risk of exposure, wash your animal's feet after the visit with soap and water and rinse well.
- Animals should not lick clients, especially not on the face. Animals have developed MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* -- rarely) because the MRSA bacteria of infected individuals were spread from licking, or an individual with MRSA, kissed an animal and passed the bacteria on to them. **YAYABA** (you are your animal's best advocate).
- Handlers and animals should avoid visiting if either of you have an open wound or are ill. If there is another animal in the household that is ill, do not visit.
- It is wise and professional 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, do not visit to prevent contracting the illness and spreading 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. 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.

If you find a facility uncooperative, professionally work with the facility to increase awareness and education. If they do not comply, do not visit. They need to be aware of and accept these minimum protections for their clients, your animal and you. If necessary, go to the person in the facility that has responsibility for infection control.

In many instances, facilities will have additional techniques they require. This is especially true if visiting clients whose immune systems are depressed and who are more susceptible to infection. Honor this.

Infection Control is imperative because team members should not be responsible for the spread of disease in any setting. Conversely, as a registered and professional team, who is offering pet-assisted therapy visits, oftentimes free, facilities and staff should be respectful of you and your pet. The goal is to increase education and well-being. *Thank for making a difference.*