



Help Seniors Stay On-Guard Against Germs

By Leslie Knopp,
Comfort Keepers® Franchise Owner in Traverse City, Michigan

As people grow older, the body's natural defenses against disease weaken. To protect seniors' health and quality of life, caregivers and family members of elderly individuals strengthen their efforts to keep germs at bay.

It starts with simple hand washing. This is a key practice that substantially reduces the risk of illness – something caregivers and the cared for need to do several times a day. Though we may not always think about it, our hands transfer germs whenever we touch something or someone and then touch our eyes, mouth or nose. To eliminate most of the germs on your hands, wash with soap for at least 15 to 20 seconds. You should be sure to wash your hands before you eat or prepare food, immediately after handling raw foods like poultry, after using the bathroom, after any contact with blood or bodily fluids, after touching a trash can or cleaning cloth, or before dressing a wound or dispensing medicines.

Another time to be on guard is during cold, flu or allergy season. Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and wash your hands or use hand sanitizer so you do not spread the germs. Be sure to throw your tissues away before washing your hands instead of leaving them around for others to risk infection.

“Since gloves do not provide an absolute barrier to germs, make sure to wash your hands regularly throughout the day...even after wearing gloves,” said Kym Clark, RN, Manager of Client Care Services for the Comfort Keepers®franchisor.

Clark continued, “In addition to providing companionship and bringing dignity to the lives of seniors, as a caregiver you have the responsibility to help safeguard seniors against the spread of germs.”

For the elderly with chronic health conditions, even cold germs can be dangerous. Have family members or friends in the wings ready to help care for your loved one when you're sick. And if you are a professional caregiver or work with seniors, always call in sick when you are ill.

Skin infections represent another health danger to the elderly. Seniors may not need a bath every day but do need to bathe often enough to prevent skin infection. To help seniors keep their skin from getting too dry, make sure they use a moisturizing skin lotion.

As a caregiver, you can also protect seniors' health by keeping hard surfaces like kitchen countertops, tabletops, desktops, and bathroom surfaces clean and disinfected. Use a combination detergent and disinfectant or a cleaner first, followed by a thorough rinsing and disinfectant.

Clean and disinfect other commonly-touched surfaces, such as doorknobs and kitchen appliance handles and controls. Use sanitizing wipes on electronic items such as phones, computer keyboards and remote controls.

And when you clean, don't forget what goes on behind the closed door of a refrigerator. Bacteria may lurk, which can lead to food poisoning when food is left too long, the refrigerator is dirty or the temperature is not cold enough.

"You can't stop every germ," says Clark, "but as a caregiver you can help seniors intensify resistance to infection."

For more information about Comfort Keepers services, call (231) 929-9044 or visit comfortkeeperstc.com.

About Comfort Keepers of Northern Lower Michigan

Comfort Keepers® of Northern Lower Michigan has been owned by Russ and Leslie Knopp since 2005. The organization provides in-home senior care on an hourly, daily, weekly or live-in basis for individuals who need assistance with activities of daily living. Its quality services are tailored to the individual needs of each client and, in the case of seniors, allow them to continue living safely and in the privacy of their own home.