

IPAC Core Competencies - Control of the Environment

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General Introduction to Routine Practices

Welcome to Core Competency Routine Practice Module Control of the Environment.

*Routine Practices are the infection prevention and control practices that must be used routinely during **all** activities with **all** clients, patients or residents, to help prevent and control the spread of infectious agents in all health care settings. No matter what health care setting you work in, routine practices **always** apply.*

Overview

In this component, you will learn about:

- how controlling the environment can help prevent infections
- effective cleaning of the environment and equipment, and
- Engineering Controls

Objectives

The objectives for this component are to:

- describe factors determining clients/patients/residents accommodation and placement to prevent the transmission of infection in health care settings
- describe how Engineering Controls and facility design help reduce the risk of infection, and
- apply appropriate environmental cleaning, linen and waste management strategies to help reduce the risk of infection.

In **your** workplace **you** may be called staff, health care provider or health care worker.

In this component, we'll use the term health care provider.

Microorganisms in Health Care Settings

Do you remember the chain of transmission? Infectious agents can be found **everywhere**. The environment in health care is a reservoir for infectious agents. **Effective** control of the environment helps **reduce** infections and makes health care settings safer.

Control of the Environment and Health Care Settings

Whether you work in a large health care facility, a community clinic in an office building, a client's home or a prehospital setting, you need to be aware of ways to control the environment to help prevent infection.

Controlling the Environment

Control of the environment includes the structural design of a health care setting, such as the number of single rooms and private bathrooms or dedicated hand-washing sinks. Incorporating design measures into the infrastructure of a healthcare setting is the preferred way to control the environment.

Environmental cleaning, linen and waste management are measures that are dependent on health care providers to implement and use, based on best practices.

Measures built into the Structure

Appropriate placement and accommodation helps to prevent the transmission of infectious agents and makes the health care environment safer.

Engineering Controls help manage risks or hazards and can also help prevent infection. This is because they are built into the physical structure to help protect you.

Accommodation and Placement

Most health care providers do not have control over the design of their health care setting.

Appropriate placement of clients, patients or residents is necessary to help prevent the spread of infectious agents through the different modes.

Clients, patients or residents who soil their environment, have uncontained drainage or incontinence can place others at risk if they cannot follow directions.

Studies have shown a relationship between the use of single rooms and reduced transmission of infectious agents, but single rooms are not always available. That is why we need to have policies for placement.

Special accommodation may not be practical or possible in settings such as prehospital care or home care settings.

Stop & think

Think about your experiences with moving, placing or relocating clients, patients or residents with infections in your health care setting.

Why was the move required?

Which potential infection transmission risks were taken into consideration?

Engineering Controls

Engineering Controls are the physical or mechanical measures put in place in your health care setting to help reduce the risk of infection to health care providers and/or to clients, patients or residents.

For example, there may be specially engineered environments, such as a negative pressure space in a hospital, or a physical barrier in the reception area of a clinic. Dedicated hand-washing sinks placed in convenient locations are another type of Engineering Control, because they make it easier for staff to clean their hands.

For those of you who work in community settings, Engineering Controls may not be in place. Home health care providers and those who work in emergency services need to adapt the care they provide based on each unique setting. This will be discussed later in this component.

HVAC

Effective Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in health care settings are important to good infection prevention and control practice and can help prevent the spread of infection.

HVAC can be specially adapted for certain high risk areas such as rooms housing individuals with airborne infections. It can also be adapted for specialty areas such as the operating rooms, medical device reprocessing areas and ambulances.

Air flow may need to be “inward” or away from the door or hallway. This is called “negative pressure”, and is used in airborne infection isolation rooms. This helps prevent infectious agents from leaving the room.

“Positive pressure” is when air flow is directed outwards or towards the door or hallway. This helps to keep infectious agents from entering the room.

HVAC

In community settings, such as client’s home or an office setting, you will have limited control over air circulation and temperature. We all need to work safely. For example, you might consider opening or closing a window or door in a client’s home to help with air circulation or temperature control. If you think the client’s home (or your workplace) is not safe, contact your supervisor to discuss the situation. You may need to find alternate ways of providing care such as using another setting.

Physical Barriers

Physical barriers are another Engineering Control in a health care setting. For example, you’ve all seen curtains between beds in emergency room multi-bed areas, clinics and hospitals, or in a long-term care setting.

Barriers are often used to protect staff from coughing clients, patients or residents in reception areas. Another example of this type of barrier is glass or acrylic barriers and windows in reception areas and ambulances.

Screens on windows are used to help prevent bugs and pests, such as mosquitoes, from entering a health care facility.

These are all examples of **physical** barriers that are used to help prevent the risk of transmission of infectious agents.

Hand Hygiene Equipment

Remember: hand hygiene is an important action you can take to help prevent the transmission of infection.

Alcohol-based hand rub, or ABHR, is the “gold standard” for hand hygiene in health care when hands are not visibly soiled. It should be available for use at point-of-care, within arm’s reach of where client/patient/resident care is provided.

Ideally, dedicated “hands-free” hand washing sinks should be installed at convenient locations so that health care providers can easily use them. Along with sinks, you need liquid soap, a paper towel dispenser and a garbage bin located close to the area.

It is a good practice for home health care providers and emergency responders to carry alcohol-based hand rub with them. Towelettes should also be carried to remove soil before cleaning with ABHR.

Point-of-Care Sharps Containers

It is important for every health care setting to provide sharps containers that are puncture-resistant and available at point-of-care.

Health care settings such as hospitals, long-term care homes and clinics install sharps containers, but health care providers who work in a client’s home or in prehospital settings

need to know how they will dispose of a sharp before it is used. A portable sharps container may be an alternative.

Safe Handling of Sharps

A sharp is an object capable of causing punctures or cuts, such as needles.

A sharps injury is an example of an occupational injury in health care. Everyone must use safety-engineered needles to protect themselves and others from injury or infection from a needle-stick or sharps injury. Use of safety-engineered needles is required for all health care providers in Ontario.

It is also important to have puncture-resistant sharps containers available at point-of-care.

Sharps injury prevention programs will be discussed in the Administrative Controls component of the Routine Practices module.

Stop & think

What Engineering Controls are in **your** health care setting?

How have these Engineering Controls made your workplace safer?

Control of the Environment

Now we will talk about measures that health care providers can take to control the environment to help prevent infection. You can clean the environment and equipment, and you can handle sharps safely.

Let's start with environment and equipment cleaning.

Environment & Equipment Cleaning

Equipment, furniture and surfaces (that is, the environment) in a health care setting can be a source of infection in susceptible individuals and has been associated with infectious outbreaks.

Cleaning provides a safe health care environment and helps prevent the transmission of infections by reducing the number of infectious agents.

Cleaning Medical Equipment/Devices

Medical equipment and devices can pose a serious risk of infection if not properly cleaned between uses on clients, patients or residents.

Equipment cleaning often involves a two-step process. Clean first, then disinfect or sterilize as indicated by manufacturer's recommendation and your policies and procedures. Medical equipment shared between clients, patients or residents (such as blood pressure cuffs or lifts) needs to be cleaned and disinfected between uses. Other medical equipment or devices (such as those used during a sterile procedure) need to be cleaned and sterilized.

Make sure you know the policies related to the correct process, what cleaning products to use and how to use them safely.

Environmental Cleaning

A clean health care environment is important for preventing the spread of infectious agents. This includes cleaning surfaces and furnishings, safe handling of linen and waste.

Environmental Cleaning

Housekeeping staff have a very important job in providing a safe environment for clients, patients or residents and healthcare providers. They need to clean according to written policies and procedures. Devoting resources to cleaning and training staff can help ensure a clean and safe health care environment.

Environmental cleaning in health care settings requires training to clean according to best practices. Training must include education about approved cleaners and disinfectants, the dilutions and contact times recommended by the manufacturer, and the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed to work with these cleaners and disinfectants.

Cleaning needs to be done routinely and following discharge or transfer, as per cleaning schedules. Cleaning schedules help identify when, where and how cleaning is done.

In some cases, special cleaning routines may be required for specified infectious agents or during outbreak situations. You will learn more about this in the Additional Precautions module.

Cleaning also needs to include auditing of the practice and feedback so that everyone is involved in maintaining a clean and safe environment.

Linen Management

Although soiled linen has rarely been linked to infection, it needs to be handled safely during collection, transport, washing and drying.

Health care providers need to do a risk assessment when handling soiled linen to determine when and how to use personal protective equipment and when to perform hand hygiene.

Soiled linen is to be handled in the same way as a routine practice, regardless of whether linen is soiled with blood or body fluids.

Beware of sharps hiding in linen! Sharps found in linen must be reported as a health and safety incident. Safe practices are required when handling sharps.

To Handle Linen Safely

Your employer should provide policies and procedures on how to handle clean and soiled linen, as well as education and training on safe linen handling. This will help protect you from exposure to infectious agents.

Here are ways to handle soiled linen:

- wear personal protective equipment according to your risk assessment
- remove gross soil using a gloved hand and dispose of it in the toilet or hopper
- handle soiled linen away from your body
- roll up soiled linen and bag it at the source
- contain wet linen in a dry sheet or towel before putting it in the linen bag
- place soiled linen in the linen bag gently, without shaking it

- tie bags securely, but do not overfill them
- handle bags by the tie, and don't allow bags to contact your body, and
- do not double-bag linen or use water-soluble bags

Waste Management

In health care settings there are additional categories of waste that come under the heading of “biomedical waste.” Each type has to be handled according to relevant legislation, and to the municipal bylaws in your area.

Biomedical waste includes human anatomical waste; human and animal cultures or specimens; human liquid blood and blood products; items contaminated with blood or blood products that would release liquid or semi-liquid blood if compressed or squeezed; body fluids visibly contaminated with blood; sharps; and broken glass that has come into contact with blood or body fluid.

Disposal Streams

Let's discuss the different types of waste.

There are five different waste categories in health care settings, each requiring its own special handling and associated with a particular colour of bag to indicate the handling required. For example, health care providers who work in the operating room need to know how to handle anatomical waste (red), and laboratory workers need to know how to handle microbiological waste (yellow).

Your organization will provide you with the information you need to handle waste safely.

Health Care Providers Responsibilities

What do health care providers need to know about waste?

You need to know the various waste categories and how to handle contaminated waste. In addition, you should ensure you are immunized against hepatitis B.

Handling Waste

To protect you when handling waste, perform a risk assessment and wear personal protective equipment if necessary. For example, you may need to wear gloves.

Any time waste contains blood that could be released when the bloody item is compressed or squeezed, it needs to be disposed of in a biomedical waste or yellow bag.

Avoid compressing or squeezing the contents of the bag, because it can increase your risk of a sharps injury if sharps are mistakenly placed in the bag.

Don't overfill the bag, because it is more likely to break. Close the bag when it is three-quarters full.

Always tie the bag securely before transporting to avoid spilling the bag's contents.

Make sure you learn about the waste categories and requirements for disposal.

There is no need to double-bag waste unless the first bag becomes stretched or damaged.

Practice Activity

We have now completed the content for the "Control of the Environment" component.

Let's see if you know how to apply this information in your everyday work.

Here is a practice activity.

Before you start this practice activity, you will have to choose the sector that best fits your workplace setting.

Click on the links below to access a practice activity that is relevant to your workplace setting:

[Community Care](#)

[Long Term Care](#)

[Acute Care](#)

Community Care

Community Care Part 1 of 8

You work in a clinic. Miss East is in the clinic waiting room and has a new cough and shortness of breath. She has red cheeks and is flushed.

What Environmental Controls help to prevent the transmission of infectious agents in the clinic waiting room?

What objects in a waiting room can help prevent the transmission of infectious agents?

Options:

Coat Rack

Toys

Acrylic barrier at the reception desk

Magazine

Alcohol-based hand rub

Brochures

Poster of “how to Cover Your Cough”

Answer:

Alcohol-based hand rub

Acrylic barrier at the reception desk

Alcohol-based hand rub, or ABHR should be available for use at point-of-care, within arm’s reach of where client/patient/resident care is provided. Acrylic barriers help protect the receptionist from potentially infectious droplets from Miss East.

Magazine, Coat Rack, Toys and Brochures are not Environmental Controls. Poster of “how to Cover Your Cough” is not an Environmental Control, but it is an educational tool that helps clients to learn how to cover their cough to prevent the transmission of respiratory infection.

Community Care Part 2 of 8

What factors would be considered for Miss East’s accommodation in the clinic? Identify the factor(s) that help to prevent the transmission of infectious agents.

Options:

The number of clinic rooms available

An empty clinic room reserved for isolation purposes

Miss East's ability to follow directions to cover her coughs and sneezes

The ability to maintain a physical distance between people in the waiting room

Answer:

The number of clinic rooms available

An empty clinic room reserved for isolation purposes

Miss East's ability to follow directions to cover her coughs and sneezes

The ability to maintain a physical distance between people in the waiting room

If there are extra rooms, Miss East can be placed in one while she waits. This helps to limit the potential for transmission of infectious agents to other clients in the waiting room.

When it is assessed that clients may have the potential to spread infectious agents, it is good practice to immediately usher them into a single clinic room and see them as soon as possible.

If Miss East is able to cover her cough and sneezes or wear a mask, the risk of transmission of infectious agents is reduced.

In crowded rooms, infectious agents are more likely to be transmitted from person to person.

Community Care Part 3 of 8

Miss East is moved into a clinic examination room. What Environmental Controls would help to prevent the transmission of infectious agents in the clinic examination room?

Which objects in the room can help prevent the transmission of infectious agents?

Options:

Alcohol-based hand rub

Mask in a box on the counter

Tub of baby wipes on a counter

Gloves in a box on the counter

Hand washing sink

Answer:

Alcohol-based hand rub

Hand washing sink

Alcohol-based hand rub or ABHR should be available for use at point-of-care, within arm's reach of where client/patient/resident care is provided.

Dedicated "hands-free" hand washing sinks should be installed at convenient locations so that health care providers can easily use them.

While masks box is an important health care supply to help protect the healthcare provider, it is not built into the clinic physical structure and is not considered an Environmental Control.

Tub of baby wipes on a counter is not built into the clinic physical structure and is not considered an Environmental Control.

While gloves box is an important health care supply to help protect the healthcare provider, it is not built into the clinic physical structure and is not considered an Environmental Control.

Community Care Part 4 of 8

A baby comes into your clinic for a well-baby examination.

"You are here for your well-baby examination! First, I'll take off your diaper; then I'll put you on the scale to weigh- in."

You remove his diaper and put him on the scale. He urinates all over the wall, himself and the scale and also has a bowel movement.

"Oh my! You just peed all over yourself and the scale, the wall, and you've had a bowel movement, too!"

Community Care Part 5 of 8

You and his mother look after the baby. Then you need to clean up the scale and walls with paper towels and disinfectant.

How can you control the environment to help prevent the transmission of infectious agents?

Options:

Use a green, black or clear bag to collect the garbage

Use a yellow bag to collect the garbage

Use a higher concentration of cleaners and disinfectants

Answer:

Use a green, black or clear bag to collect the garbage

Green or black or clear bags are used for general waste. This is a waste standard from Ontario's guideline for waste management.

Yellow bags should be used for fluid medical waste. This is not necessary in this scenario.

Always follow manufacturer recommendations for the dilution and correct concentration of cleaners and disinfectants.

Community Care Part 6 of 8

You are a paramedic who arrives, assesses and transports a client to the hospital. The client vomits all over the ambulance stretcher, his clothes and the ambulance.

What action(s) should be taken to help prevent the transmission of infectious agents? Identify the option(s) that show proper linen handling.

Options:

Contain wet linen in a dry sheet before putting it in a linen bag

Use double bags to contain wet linen

Shake off any gross soil from the stretcher linen

Put soiled linen into a linen hamper

Answer:

Contain wet linen in a dry sheet before putting it in a linen bag

Put soiled linen into a linen hamper

Containing wet linen in a dry sheet helps to prevent leaking. Always place soiled linen directly into a linen hamper.

Containing wet linen in water-soluble bags or double bags is not necessary and **not** recommended. Do not shake soiled linen; shaking it can release potentially infectious particles into the air and onto surfaces. When there is gross soil on linen, remove it with a gloved hand.

Community Care Part 7 of 8

You are a personal support worker visiting a client for the first time.

The client's home has many animals, is very messy and crowded, and has accumulated garbage. You can smell some very strong odours.

Community Care Part 8 of 8

What strategy (ies) can you use to help control the environment?

Options:

Open the window

Clear away garbage and clutter in your work area

Call your supervisor about your concerns

Use full-strength disinfectant

Answer:

Open the window

Clear away garbage and clutter in your work area

Call your supervisor about your concerns

Opening the window is a good strategy to promote ventilation and air flow. It may help reduce odours in the home.

Clearing away garbage and clutter in your work area may be necessary to help clean the client's environment where you are providing care. Health care waste regulations do not apply to client homes. Special colours of garbage bags are not required in a client's home. Follow the local municipal regulations for waste management.

Calling your supervisor about your concerns is an important action to take. You need to be safe while at work. Based on a risk assessment, your supervisor may be able to arrange an alternate location for the client's care.

Do not use full-strength disinfectant. Always follow manufacturer recommendations for dilution and for use.

Long-Term Care

Long-Term Care Part 1 of 4

You are looking after Mrs. South, who is in a two-bed room and has uncontrolled diarrhea.

What Environmental Controls and barriers would help to prevent the transmission of infectious

agents in Mrs. South's room?

Think about the object(s) in the room that help prevent the transmission of infectious agents.

Options:

Alcohol-based hand rub

Telephone

Call bell

Hand washing sink

Curtains

Answer:

Alcohol-based hand rub

Hand washing sink

Curtains

Alcohol-based hand rub, or ABHR should be available for use at point-of-care, within arm's reach of where client/patient/resident care is provided.

Dedicated "hands-free" hand washing sinks should be installed at convenient locations so that health care providers can easily use them.

Curtains in multi-bed rooms may help prevent infection by defining patient spaces, providing a physical reminder to the health care provider about Mrs. South's environment and helping to protect Mrs. South's roommates.

While call bell or telephone may be vehicles for the spread of infectious agents, they are not considered Environmental Controls or barriers.

Long-Term Care Part 2 of 4

What factors may have been considered for Mrs. South's placement or accommodation to help reduce the transmission of infectious agents?

Options:

The number of single rooms available

The number of soiled utility rooms

Mrs. South's ability to follow directions about hand hygiene

The roommate's ability to fight off infection

Answer:

The number of single rooms available

Mrs. South's ability to follow directions about hand hygiene

The roommate's ability to fight off infection

Studies have shown a clear relationship between the use of single rooms and reduced infection. If Mrs. South is able to follow simple instructions about hand hygiene or not contaminating or soiling her environment, then a single room may not be required.

Residents are accommodated based on their risk of acquiring an infection. If the other person in the room is at high risk of acquiring an infection, then Mrs. South may not be a suitable roommate.

The potential risk of infection is not affected by the number of soiled utility rooms.

Long-Term Care Part 3 of 4

Mrs. South soils her bed and her bed space. How should you handle the linen? Identify the options(s) for proper handling.

Options:

Contain wet linen in a dry sheet before putting it in a linen bag.

Use double bags to contain wet.

Shake off any gross soil on the linen.

Put soiled linen into a linen hamper.

Answer:

Contain wet linen in a dry sheet before putting it in a linen bag.

Put soiled linen into a linen hamper.

Containing wet linen in a dry sheet helps to prevent leaking. Always place soiled linen **directly** into a linen hamper.

Containing wet linen in water-soluble bags or double bags is not necessary and **not** recommended. Do not shake soiled linen; shaking it can release potentially infectious particles into the air and onto surfaces. When there is gross soil on linen, remove it with a gloved hand.

Long-Term Care Part 4 of 4

“I know this is your first day here. Welcome!”

“Thank you for doing my orientation. What do I need to know and do?”

Mrs. South’s room requires cleaning. There are tissues, paper cups, a lightly soiled pad and a heavily soaked, leaking brief on the floor. How should Mrs. South’s room be cleaned?

Options:

Use a green, black or clear bag to collect the garbage

Use a yellow bag for fluid waste that contains blood or bloody body fluids

Use a higher concentration of cleaners and disinfectants

Answer:

Use a green, black or clear bag to collect the garbage

Green, black or clear bags are used for general waste. This is a waste standard from Ontario’s guideline for waste management.

Yellow bags should be used for fluid medical waste. In this instance, a yellow bag is not necessary. Always follow manufacturer directions for the dilution and correct concentration of cleaners and disinfectants.

Acute Care

Acute Care Part 1 of 6

You are looking after Mrs. North, who is currently in a four-bed room and has diarrhea. While waiting to move Mrs. North to a single room, what Environmental Controls and barriers may help to prevent the transmission of infectious agents in Mrs. North’s room?

Which object(s) in the room could help prevent the transmission of infectious agents?

Options:

Telephone

Alcohol-based hand rub

Call bell

Curtains

Answer:

Alcohol-based hand rub

Curtains

Alcohol-based hand rub, or ABHR should be available for use at point-of-care, within arm's reach of where client/patient/resident care is provided

Curtains in multi-bed rooms may help prevent the spread of infectious agents by defining patient spaces, providing a physical barrier to remind the health care provider about Mrs. North's environment and helping to protect Mrs. North's roommates.

While a telephone and a call bell may be vehicles for the spread of infectious agents, they are not Environmental Controls or barriers.

Acute Care Part 2 of 6

Mrs. North has just been discharged. Her room requires discharge cleaning. The breakfast tray is still on the bedside table. The garbage contains tissue, paper cups and a lightly-soiled dressing.

"Mrs. North has been discharged".

"This is my first time cleaning a room after discharge. How do I clean the room?"

Acute Care Part 3 of 6

How can the health care provider control the environment to help prevent the transmission of infectious agents? Identify the appropriate action(s).

Options:

Use a green, black or clear bag to collect the garbage

Use a yellow bag to collect the garbage

Use a higher concentration of cleaners and disinfectants

Bag the breakfast tray and send to food services

Answer:

Use a green, black or clear bag to collect the garbage

Green, black or clear bags are used for general waste. This is a waste standard from Ontario's guideline for waste management.

Yellow bags should be used for fluid medical waste. In this instance, a yellow bag is not necessary. Always follow manufacturer directions for the dilution and correct concentration of cleaners and disinfectants. Routine food-handling practices are sufficient. It is not necessary to bag the tray before sending it to food services.

Acute Care Part 4 of 6

You are looking after a baby. As you are undoing his diaper, he immediately urinates all over his crib and bedding. He also has a large, loose bowel movement.

Acute Care Part 5 of 6

How can you control the environment to help prevent the transmission of infectious agents? Identify the option(s) that indicate proper linen handling.

Options:

Contain wet linen in a dry sheet before putting it in a linen bag

Use double bags to contain wet linen

Shake off any gross soil on the linen

Put soiled linen into a linen hamper

Answer:

Contain wet linen in a dry sheet before putting it in a linen bag

Put soiled linen into a linen hamper

Containing wet linen in a dry sheet helps to prevent leaking. Always place soiled linen **directly** into a linen hamper.

Containing wet linen in water-soluble bags or double bags is not necessary and not recommended. Do not shake soiled linen; shaking it can release potentially infectious particles into the air and onto surfaces. When there is gross soil on linen, remove it with a gloved hand.

Acute Care Part 6 of 6

Mr. East has a heavily-draining infected wound. He is in a two-bed room. What factors may have been considered for Mr. East's placement/accommodation to help reduce the transmission of infectious agents?

Options:

The number of single rooms available

The number of soiled utility rooms

Mr. East's ability to follow directions about his hygiene

The roommate's ability to fight off infection

Answer:

The number of single rooms available

Mr. East's ability to follow directions about his hygiene

The roommate's ability to fight off infection

Studies have shown a clear relationship between the use of single rooms and reduced infection. If Mr. East is able to follow simple instructions about hand hygiene and preventing contamination or soiling of his environment, then a single room may not be required. Patients are accommodated based on their risk of acquiring an infection. If the other person in the room is at high risk of acquiring an infection, Mr. East may not be a suitable roommate.

The potential risk of infection is not affected by the number of soiled utility rooms.

Summary

Controlling the environment:

- has been shown to help prevent infections
- is influenced by the structure and design of the health care setting, and
- includes actions by the health care provider to keep the health care environment and equipment clean and safe

Challenge Questions

This is the end of the Control of the Environment component.

To show that you have completed this component, there is a test. There are five questions in the test.

You need to answer every question correctly, and then you can print out a certificate.

If you do not answer questions correctly, review the material and retake the test.

If you are ready, please return to the [PHO website](#) and select the Challenge Question document that corresponds with this module.