Bathing & Infection Control

- If you help a client with toileting right before bath time, don’t start the bath while wearing the same pair of gloves. Throw away your dirty gloves, wash your hands and put on a clean pair of gloves.

- When cleaning a client’s eyes, wipe each eye with a different corner of a washcloth. This prevents spreading infection from one eye to the other.

- Change the bath water whenever it:
  - Gets too soapy.
  - Cools off.
  - Becomes contaminated with body secretions.

- Practice standard precautions during the bathing process. For example, wear gloves whenever:
  - Feces and/or urine is present.
  - A client has open sores.
  - You give perineal care.

- Always clean a client’s perineal area from front to back to avoid spreading germs from the anal area to the urinary area. (Use a separate, clean washcloth for this part of the bath.)

- Collect soiled towels and washcloths and place them in the appropriate laundry bag or container. Be sure to keep them off the floor. (You may want to review the policy for handling dirty linens at your workplace to find out whether you are required to wear gloves when handling linens.)

Can You Believe It?

The following laws are real! Some of them are even still “on the books”—although they are not enforced. (At least, we hope not!)

**Arizona:** Anyone caught stealing a bar of soap must wash himself with it until it’s all used up.

**California:** In Los Angeles, it’s illegal to bathe two babies in the same tub at the same time.

**Indiana:** Bathing in the winter is against the law.

**Kentucky:** Every citizen in Kentucky is required to take a bath at least once a year.

**Maryland:** It’s illegal to scrub a bathtub no matter how dirty it gets.

**Massachusetts:** In Boston, it’s illegal to take a bath unless you have been ordered to do so by a physician.

**Vermont:** Everyone in Vermont is required to take a bath once a week on Saturday night.

---

**Time To Laugh!**

Feeling stressed out, Jim decided to take a hot bath. Just as he’d gotten comfortable, the doorbell rang. Jim got out of the tub, put on his slippers and a large towel, wrapped his head in a smaller towel and went to the door. There stood a salesman, wanting to know if Jim needed any brushes. Slamming the door, Jim returned to his bath.

The doorbell rang again. On went the slippers and towels, and Jim headed for the door once more. He took one step, slipped on a wet spot, fell and hit his back against the hard edge of the tub.

Jim struggled into his street clothes and, in great pain, drove to the doctor. After examining him, the doctor said, “Nothing's broken. But you need to relax. Why don’t you go home and take a hot bath?”
Bathing & Safety

- The greatest danger in a bathroom comes when clients get in and out of the tub or shower. The risk of falling is high!

- As you assist clients in and out of the tub or shower, you are at risk for falling, too. Most of these “double” falls happen:
  - At the end of the bath when the client is tired and/or relaxed.
  - If a client’s physical condition has worsened.
  - While transferring a client out of a tub—because the client’s body, the tub and the floor are wet and slippery.

- Your clients may be physically dependent on you for help at bath time. For example, a client with arthritis may not be able to turn the water faucets on and off. A client may also be psychologically dependent on you. For example, he or she may be afraid to take a bath alone for fear of falling.

*Whether the problem is physical, psychological or both, keep each client’s safety in mind at all times.*

Try following these tips:

- Wear rubber-soled shoes when assisting clients at bath time.

- If you work in clients’ homes—and have access to a cell phone—consider keeping it in the bathroom during bath time. You’ll be able to call for help if you and/or the client falls down.

- Make sure there are non-skid mats on the inside and the outside of the tub or shower.

- Keep the bathroom well-lit during bath time. Make sure it is well-ventilated, too, so that the room doesn’t become too hot. (You—and your client—may become faint in the heat.)

- Remember that older people are more sensitive to heat and cold. Test the temperature of the water before your elderly clients get into the tub or shower. If you use a bath thermometer, it should read between 105 and 110 degrees F. After reading the thermometer, test the water on the inside of your wrist...and consider asking your client to do the same.

- If the bath area is equipped with an emergency call button, make sure your client knows how to use it.

- Never let a client grab onto a towel bar or a soap dish for support. These items are not meant to hold a person’s weight and could pull right out of the wall.

- Empty the tub before you help your client out of it. Getting out of an empty tub is easier than getting out of a filled one.

---

- Every year, as many as seventy senior citizens die after being burned by hot water in the bathtub.

- If people are exposed to 180 degree water for just one second, they will develop deep third degree burns. Water this hot can also cause someone’s skin and toenails to peel off.

- Every day, one American dies from an accident in the bathtub or shower.
Tools & Equipment For Bath Time

Studies have shown that most elderly people with disabilities do not have the necessary safety equipment installed in their bathrooms. For example:

- 68% do not have grab bars.
- 80% do not have a raised toilet seat.
- 46% do not have a non-slip bath mat.

Be sure to notify your supervisor if you notice safety hazards in your client's bathroom!

Transfer Benches

- A transfer bench sits partway outside and partway inside a bathtub. Your client sits on the bench and gradually slides his body inside the tub.
- Transfer benches come in various sizes. Some can be adjusted to different heights. Some have backrests. Most transfer benches have rubberized legs so they may be positioned securely inside the tub.

Grab Bars

- Grab bars come in various designs, including:
  - Horizontal
  - Vertical
  - Diagonal
  - Wrap Around
- They may be mounted to the wall, floor, ceiling or tub.
- Some bars have ridges in the metal or are covered with vinyl to make them easier to grab.

- Grab bars don’t do any good if they are placed too high or too low for clients to reach. Most people need bars installed in two different positions: one for use in getting in and out of the tub in a standing position; and one for lowering or raising the body from a seated position.

Handheld Showers

- Some clients may benefit from a handheld shower. They may find it easier to clean themselves if they are able to direct the water onto “hard to reach” body parts.

Shower Chairs

- If your clients enjoy taking a shower, but are unable to stand for long periods of time, a shower chair may be the answer.

Other items that may make bath time safer for your clients include:

- Mechanical or hydraulic bath lifts.
- Special adapters for turning on water faucets.
- Long-handled sponges.
- Wash mitts.
- Floor-to-ceiling grab poles.
- Foam faucet protectors (to cushion fixtures in the tub).
Q: What are some tips for bathing a baby?
A: Make sure you have all your supplies within reach before starting the bath—since you must never leave a baby alone in or near a bath. Use a mild soap and a soft washcloth. Avoid tub baths for a newborn until his cord stump falls off (and circumcision heals). Remember to take time during the bath to hold, cuddle and talk to the baby.

Q: How does the skin change as we age?
A: As people get older, the skin becomes thinner and develops fine wrinkles. Many people develop “age spots” which look like large freckles. The glands that produce oil become less active, so the skin contains less moisture. Elderly people often have dry, fragile skin that can be torn or injured easily.

Q: Isn’t bath time a good time for nail care?
A: Bath time is a great time to clean your client’s nails. However, be sure to follow your workplace policy about trimming and filing nails. Some clients, especially diabetics, must have their nails trimmed by a nurse or doctor.

Q: What if I’m ordered to give a bed bath but the client, Mr. Brown, wants to get in the tub?
A: You should explain to Mr. Brown that you need to follow your orders as written in his plan of care. Remind him that the plan of care was created with his best interests in mind. Tell Mr. Brown that you will ask your supervisor if the orders can be changed to a tub bath for next time. (Remember, though, that Mr. Brown has the right to refuse care. You must not force him to have a bath if he refuses. Be sure to notify your supervisor whenever a client refuses a bath.)

Q: What’s the best way to document personal care?
A: Your supervisor can tell you the forms needed to document personal care at your workplace. Many facilities use flow sheets. Home health agencies usually use visit notes. Be sure to document exactly what you did, including: the type of bath provided, the client’s level of participation and anything unusual that you observed.

Q: What’s the deal with home health clients on Medicare needing to have a bath?
A: As a home health aide, have you ever heard that you must get your Medicare client “wet” during each visit? Here’s the deal: Medicare clients may receive assistance from a home health aide only when they are acutely ill. They must have a temporary medical problem causing them to need help with their personal care. This personal care must include some type of full or partial bath during every visit or Medicare will not pay for the aide’s time. So, if your client refuses a bath or a family member has already done the bath when you arrive, let your supervisor know before you begin your client care. You may be asked to skip your visit that day. (NOTE: This “rule” does not apply to Medicare clients receiving hospice care.)