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Intercare Corporate Group Inc.

"The Heart of Excellence"

Infection Prevention & Control (IPC)

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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Proper Use and Common Misuse

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is the final line of defense and protection against workplace and/or environmental hazards. PPE minimizes exposure to risks, but does not eliminate the hazard itself. Proper PPE usage saves lives, whereas PPE misuse can lead to false confidence, injuries or hazardous contamination.

Proper PPE Use

Effective PPE management relies on correct PPE selection, fit and protocols.

- **Hierarchy of Controls:** Always prioritize hazard elimination, substitution, and engineering controls (like ventilation) before relying strictly on PPE.
- **Fit-Testing:** Equipment like N95 respirators must be properly fit-tested to your facial structure to prevent dangerous leakage.
- **Sequence:** Apply and remove PPE in a specific order (e.g., gowns, then masks, eye protection, and gloves) to avoid self-contamination.
- **Inspection:** Always inspect PPE for damage, tears, or expiration dates before every use.

Common PPE Misuse

Common PPE misuse typically stems from time pressures, complacency and fatigue. The most frequent errors include skipping hand hygiene before and after contact, touching the face or clothes with contaminated gloves and improper removal procedures (doffing) lead to self-contamination. The most critical and commonly observed errors include:

Donning ('putting on' PPE) and Doffing ('taking off' PPE) Mistakes:

- **Contaminated Doffing Sequence:** Removing gloves or masks in the wrong order, causing pathogens to transfer to the face, hair or gowns/scrubs/uniforms.
- **Touching External Surfaces:** Grabbing the outside of goggles, the front of a mask or the soiled exterior of a gown with bare hands.
- **Missing Hand Hygiene:** Failing to perform proper hand hygiene in between doffing steps or immediately after removing gloves.

Glove Misuse:

- **Cross-Contamination:** Touching personal items (e.g. cell phones, stethoscopes), doorknobs, handrails or clean surfaces with soiled gloves.
- **False Sense of Security:** Wearing gloves for too long or failing to wash hands after removing them.

Mask and Respirator Errors:

- **Incorrect Fit:** Wearing respirators (e.g. N95 masks) without a proper seal, allowing aerosols to bypass the barrier.
- **Improper Positioning:** Pulling masks down to the chin or letting them hang around the neck, which contaminates the interior of the mask.
- **Prolonged Use:** Wearing masks beyond their recommended manufacturer lifespan or allowing them to become damp, which severely degrades filtration efficacy.

Gowning and Wearing Habits:

- **Wearing PPE in Public Areas:** Moving through hallways, breakrooms, or waiting areas while still wearing contaminated gowns or gloves.
- **Reusing Disposables:** Using single-use disposable gowns or masks across multiple residents.
- **Ill-Fitting PPE:** Wearing overly loose or tight gowns and face shields that leave gaps for exposure or restrict movement.

IPC Risks in the Summer

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) risks in the summer time center on waterborne pathogens (e.g. Legionella); vector-borne diseases (e.g. West Nile virus; Lyme Disease); foodborne illnesses (e.g. Salmonella, E. Coli); and heat-driven facility-based vulnerabilities (e.g. warmer, humid conditions and power disruptions can accelerate microbial growth in water systems and food supplies).

Waterborne & Environmental Pathogens

The Risk: Warm ambient temperatures rapidly increase Legionella proliferation in cooling towers, decorative fountains and unmaintained plumbing.

Mitigation: Ensure routine water system flushing and temperature monitoring in accordance with related Alberta regulatory standards and guidelines (e.g. Accommodation Standards - Continuing Care Homes; and Alberta Health Services (AHS) Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidelines for Continuing Care Homes).

Foodborne & Gastroenteritis Outbreaks

The Risk: Perishable foods spoil much faster in high heat, which triggers summer spikes in Salmonella, Campylobacter and E. coli infections.

Mitigation: Maintain strict cold-chain and food storage standards.

Vector-Borne Illnesses

The Risk: Mild and extended summers increase the geographic spread and active season for ticks and mosquitoes, amplifying risks for Lyme Disease and West Nile virus.

Mitigation: Proactively monitor local public health alerts and advise vulnerable outdoor populations on the use of approved insect repellents.

Healthcare & Continuing Care Home Risks

The Risk: High temperatures can cause dehydration in residents and can weaken immune responses.

Mitigation: Increase hydration; utilize air conditioning and fans (in accordance with AHS Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidelines); and isolate of infected individuals.

