

Aged care sector needs quality cleaning

DIFFERING COMMERCIAL ENVIRONMENTS HAVE DIFFERING CLEANING REQUIREMENTS RELATIVE TO THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS AND SAFETY MEASURES, BUT THE AGED CARE SECTOR MUST BE EVEN MORE STRINGENT TO SAFEGUARD VULNERABLE ELDERLY PEOPLE, STAFF AND VISITORS AGAINST INFECTION, WRITES MURRAY McDONALD.

AGED care cleaning must go further than most commercial cleaning requirements. Infection control is a priority and errors can be costly. The elderly are more susceptible to illness and infections and find recovery hard.

Cleaning must prevent outbreaks of MRSA, VRE, C Difficile and Gastro, which are common to the aged care sector. It must focus on the prevention and removal of pathogens, with protocols for before, during and after the cleaning process.

Key causes of outbreaks include staff and residents transferring infection to a resident which then spreads through overlooked touch-points during the cleaning process, poor hand washing practices and finally ineffective cleaning processes that skip vital infection control procedures. Most facilities follow the right methods, but one poor cleaning job can lead to a serious outbreak.

HIGH TEMPERATURE STEAM IN INFECTION CONTROL

Steam is renowned as being a top cleaning method in infection control. Studies have confirmed the destructive speed of steam on a common pathogen to the aged care industry. One study indicated Staphylococcus samples on stainless steel and polypropylene surfaces, were eradicated in 0.6 seconds with steam vapour applied at 170 degrees Celsius at 8 bar pressure, (Sanitisation using high temperature saturated steam, Prof. Ezio Gagliardi, 1998).

INCREASED ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING

A Singapore General hospital, research report, *Impact of a hospital-wide hand hygiene promotion strategy on healthcare-associated infections*, found reducing MRSA included five key elements, one of them being "decontamination of the environment and equipment".

Touch-point cleaning, or cleaning surfaces that are regularly touched, is one of the top ways to effectively decontaminate aged care rooms and equipment.

MANAGING BODY FLUID SPILLS

Body fluid spills must be mitigated as soon as possible to stop the spread of bacteria and disease. Best practice infection control methods recommend handling them with a deep clean as soon as it is practical.

According to research journal, *Gastroenteritis and Food-Born Disease in Elderly People Living in Long Term Care*, body fluid spills, such as vomit or faeces on surfaces and floors, are persistent examples of spills that cause Gastro in aged care facilities. It is recommended that for soiled carpets, steam cleaning is required, as cleaning with cloths can be ineffective and lead to the spread of novovirus. **HA**



"INFECTION CONTROL HAS A FOCUS ON THE PREVENTION AND REMOVAL OF PATHOGENS, WHICH INCLUDES THE METHODS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE CLEANING PROCESS, NOT JUST THE CLEANING AS IT OCCURS."

CLEANING PROCESSES CHECK LIST

BEFORE CLEANING

- Do not touch bathroom surfaces before you start the cleaning process i.e. basins, toilet seats etc
- Place appropriate OH&S signs warn residents and staff about dangerous, floors, cleaning in process etc
- Establish and publish cleaning protocols and lists including all the cleaning tasks, areas and rooms that need to be cleaned, prioritise and schedule cleaning processes
- Ensure staff are correctly trained on cleaning processes, methods and equipment use.

DURING CLEANING

- When cleaning a room, surface or object, start at the top, and work your way down, in a logical, clockwise direction.
- Ensure periodic monitoring and management of cleaning process, while it occurs, to ensure infection control procedures and standards are being met – this is key to quality control
- Ensure availability and appropriateness of cleaning equipment and products to limit the possibility of "cutting corners"

AFTER CLEANING

- Ensure all touch-points in resident bedrooms, common rooms and staff rooms been effectively disinfected?
- Have cloths, sponges or any other materials that have been used to clean spills been correctly disposed of?
- Have you done an audit of the quality of cleaning and disinfecting in your facility?

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