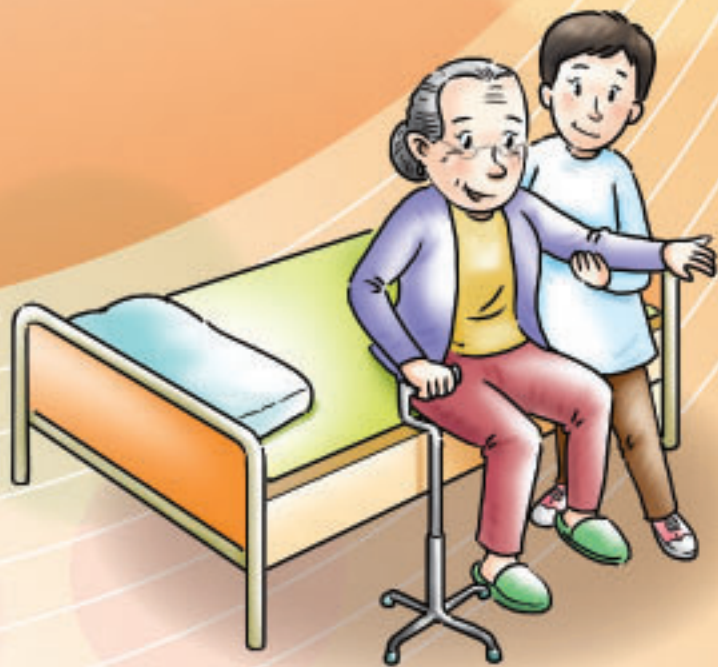


Guidelines in Occupational Safety & Health for Elderly Home Workers



Occupational Safety and Health Branch
Labour Department



OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH COUNCIL

This guide is prepared by the
Occupational Safety and Health Branch,
Labour Department

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for Elderly Home Workers**

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1. Introduction

Workers working at elderly homes not only take care of the meals and daily necessities of the residents, but also have to lift, hold or transport the elders who are infirm or incapable of mobility. In addition to manual handling, the workers may use and handle various chemicals such as disinfectants and cleaning agents. Therefore, they may be exposed to various potential health hazards during their duties.

The Occupational Safety & Health Ordinance was enacted in May 1997 to provide for the safety and health protection of employees at work. The Occupational Safety & Health Regulation made under the Ordinance covers a wide range of basic health and safety matters as well as manual handling operations and first aid facilities.

Employers are obliged to take care of the safety and health of the employees. Wherever it is reasonable and practicable, employers should eliminate the health hazards and other factors endangering the health and safety of the employees. If it is not possible to eliminate the hazards, their risks to health or safety should be reduced to the minimal.



Employees should co-operate with the employers and abide by all the rules and codes of practices pertaining to safeguard the health and safety of all workers in the workplace. They must also take precautions in their work to prevent the occurrence of any perils or infliction of injuries to themselves and their co-workers.

This guide aims at introducing some relevant provisions of the Occupational Safety & Health Regulation and highlighting some common hazards and their preventive measures for the workers working in elderly homes.

2. Manual Handling Operations

Work related to manual handling includes lifting, holding or transferring of the elders from bed to wheelchair or vice versa. Some elders who are infirm or incapable of mobility may require assistance to get out of bed or change from a sitting to standing position, even in walking. Workers who carry out lifting work with awkward posture may sustain back pain or injury. Long hours of physical demanding work with improper posture or beyond personal capability may result in musculoskeletal disorders.

Under Part VII of the Occupational Safety & Health Regulation, the employers are required to conduct a risk assessment before a manual handling operation is being undertaken by the employees. The Regulation also requires the employers to provide the preventive and protective measures for any risky manual handling operations and the necessary health and safety training for the employees.



Hints on prevention of injury:

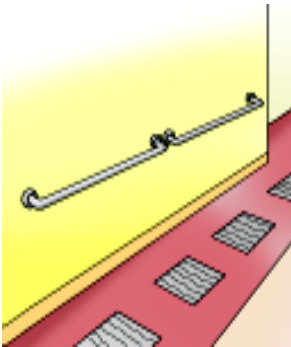
- Follow the work practices as laid down by the employers from the risk assessment findings and use mechanical aids as far as possible in lifting, holding or carrying the incapacitated elders;
- Recognize the potential risks associated with manual handling;
- Employ good posture in lifting or holding the elders and avoid excessive force, bending, twisting of the arms, wrists or neck;
- Use mechanical aids as far as possible in transporting or transferring the elders; correct operation method should be employed;
- Seek assistance from supervisor or co-workers whenever the task exceeds personal ability.



3. Workplace Safety

Workplace environmental conditions such as poor housekeeping, uneven or slippery floors, insufficient lighting or obstruction of the passageways and stairways are factors contributing to many accidents in the workplace. Such conditions may also lead to slips and falls as well as impede the escape in case of a fire.

Part IV of the Occupational Safety & Health Regulation requires the employers to ensure that the workplace environment is kept clean and adequately ventilated. The workplace must also be sufficiently well lit, by natural or artificial lighting and the floors of the workplace are adequately drained.



Hints on improvement of workplace environment

- ☞ Maintain the work areas tidy and clean;
- ☞ Put up warning signs for wet floors immediately for any spillage of water or oil and clean-up as soon as possible;
- ☞ Use non-slippery floor materials where possible;
- ☞ Maintain the passageway and fire escape route clear of any obstruction; and
- ☞ Provide adequate lighting to the work area.

4. Personal care and nursing

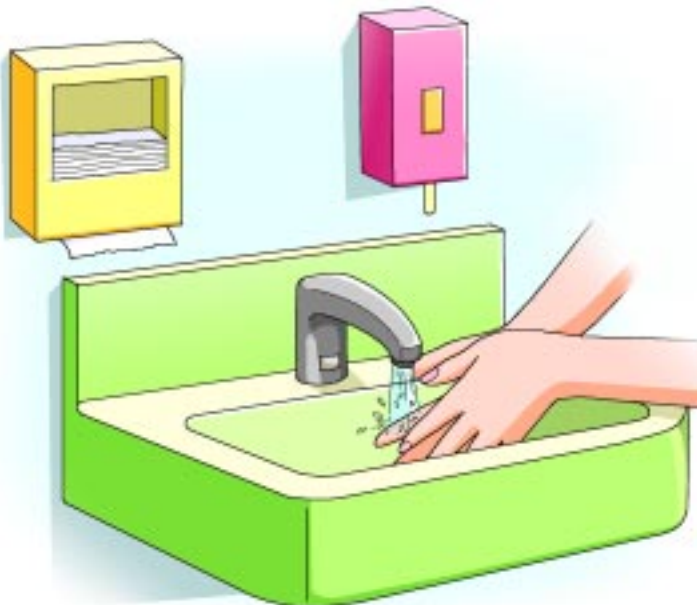
In providing personal care and nursing for the elders, the workers may use sharp instruments such as needles, scalpels and scissors which can cause injuries to them if they are not properly handled. The blood, nasal secretion, excreta, vomit and other body fluids of the infected elders may contain a large amount of bacteria and virus. Workers in contact with such materials may be infected if precautionary measures were not sufficiently taken.

Under Part IV of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulation, the employers must ensure that all waste materials and debris at the workplace are kept in suitable containers. Part VI of the Regulation requires the employers to provide first aid facilities for the workers in the workplaces.



Hints on safe nursing

- Use needles or sharp tools with safety device; do not recap used needles;
- Discard uncapped needles with syringes and any other sharps in a labeled puncture-resistant container or sharp box for disposal;
- Provide all containers of drugs with proper labels;
- Put on gloves, masks and protective clothing in performing personal care or nursing for the elders when it is possible to come into contact with blood, body fluid or excreta;
- Pay attention to personal hygiene. Cover open areas of the skin and wounds with waterproof bandages to reduce the risk of infection;
- Wash the hands and other contaminated areas of the body thoroughly after work.



5. Use of cleaning and disinfecting agents

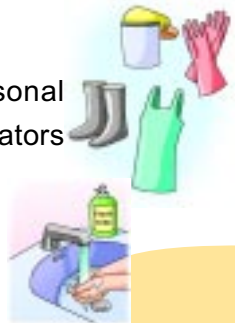
Most of the commonly used cleaning agents for toilets and floors etc., contain acidic or alkaline ingredients that may be corrosive. Some of the degreasing and stain-removing agents may contain strong organic solvents like the thinners and white spirit. These organic solvents remove the protective layer of the skin causing skin dryness or cracking leading to inflammation. Some of the organic chemicals can be absorbed into the body through the intact skin. Disinfectants including alcohol and bleaching solution may cause irritation to the skin leading to dermatitis. Corrosive chemicals in a concentrated form may cause skin burns. Incompatible chemicals when mixed can cause rigorous reactions releasing large amounts of toxic gases or fumes leading to gassing incidents. The release of toxic fumes when the beaching solution is being mixed with an acidic medium is one example. In addition, thinners, alcohols, etc., are flammable liquids. Fire and explosion may occur if they come into contact with a source of ignition or heat.

Under Part II of the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, the employers are required to make necessary arrangements to ensure the safety and health of employees in the use, handling, storage and transport of chemicals. Additionally, the employers are required to provide such information, instruction, training and supervision as may be necessary to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safety and health at work of the employees.



Hints on chemical safety

- Caution should be taken in the use and storage of chemicals.
- Related information on chemical hazards and precautions may be found in the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) or the hazards labels as provided by the suppliers or manufacturers.
- When chemicals are being used in the workplace, ensure all containers of chemicals have a proper label.
- Flammable liquid should be used clear of any heat source or naked flame; the chemicals should be kept in closed containers and stored in a strongly-constructed metal cabinet.
- Make no attempts to touch any poisonous or corrosive chemicals with bare hands. Appropriate protective gloves and safety goggles where necessary must be used when handling the chemicals.
- Volatile chemicals especially in high concentration should be used in a well-ventilated work area with open windows or operating exhaust fans.
- Understand the chemical properties and pay attention to those incompatible chemicals. Never mix the incompatible chemicals and store them separately.
- In the event of any spills of the chemical on the skin, wash the affected area with a copious amount of water immediately and seek medical attention where necessary.
- In the handling of bulk chemicals, use suitable personal protective equipment such as gloves, goggles, respirators and protective clothing.
- Hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and water after handling of chemicals.



Appendix

Related information may be found in the following publications by the Labour Department:

- ✎ A Brief Guide to the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance
- ✎ A Brief Guide to the Occupational Safety and Health Regulation
- ✎ Guidance Notes on Manual Handling Operations
- ✎ Health Care Services Occupational Safety and Health Guide - Manual Handling of Patients
- ✎ Manual Handling in Health Care Services - A Guide to the Handling of People
- ✎ Health Care Services Occupational Safety and Health Guide - Occupational Hygiene of Workers
- ✎ Introduction to Occupational Safety and Health for Health Care Workers
- ✎ Hints on First Aid
- ✎ Chemical Safety in the Workplace - Guidance Notes on Risk Assessment and Fundamentals of Establishing Safety Measures
- ✎ Chemical Safety in the Workplace - Guidance Notes on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Use and Handling of Chemicals
- ✎ Cleansing Workers - Safe use of Chemicals

Further Information or Enquiries:

If you wish to enquire about this guide or require advice on occupational health and hygiene issues, please contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department through:

Address : 15th Floor, Harbour Building, 38 Pier Road,
Central, HK

Telephone : 2852 4041

Fax : 2581 2049

E-mail : enquiry@labour.gov.hk

Information on the services provided by the Occupational Safety and Health Council can also be obtained through its hotline 2739 9000 and website <http://www.oshc.org.hk>.

Complaints

If you have any complaint about unsafe workplaces and practices, please call the Labour Department's Occupational Safety and Health Complaint Hotline on 2542 2172. All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.

