



 **Staples**Business™

SENIOR LIVING PLAYBOOK

4 Proven Infection Control Strategies to Protect Residents and Ensure Compliance

Introduction.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, infection prevention in senior living facilities has advanced significantly, but the work is far from finished. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that **between 1 and 3 million healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) occur annually in long-term care facilities in the U.S.**, resulting in as many as 388,000 resident deaths per year.^{1,2}

Beyond the human toll, the impact on the workforce is also significant, leading to high absenteeism and turnover rates, which affect day-to-day operations and limit the effectiveness of infection prevention efforts. Staffing and operational challenges, in turn, impede regulatory compliance which can lead to fines, lawsuits and, in more serious cases, loss of funding and/or licensure. The latest figures from the Long Term Care Community Coalition reveal that nationwide **nursing homes alone received \$566 million in penalties over a three-year period between 2021 to 2023 with an average fine of \$18,056.**³ These figures underscore the financial and reputational risks associated with lapses in infection prevention. Infection prevention performance also influences a facility's standing in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) Five-Star Quality Rating System, which publicly reports health inspection results, staffing levels and quality measures.

Modernizing cleaning protocols is essential to safeguard the health of residents, staff and visitors and ensure regulatory compliance. While the regulatory framework for senior living facilities varies by facility type, location and patient population, renewed vigilance can augment infection prevention efforts and reduce the risk of HAIs. This white paper outlines four key strategies to help senior living facilities enhance infection prevention, creating a safer and more positive care environment that protects residents. It can foster stronger staff engagement, ensure regulatory compliance and improve overall operational performance.

Nursing Homes Face Costly Consequences for Compliance Violations

Many penalties stem from inadequate infection control practices

Nursing Home Penalties (2021–2023)

TOTAL FINES



\$566 million in total penalties over three years

AVERAGE FINE



\$18,056 average fine per violation

4 effective infection control strategies.

1. Elevate housekeeping as key partners in frontline care.

Housekeeping staff play a critical role in infection prevention in senior living facilities, yet their contributions are often undervalued. Elevating housekeeping as key partners in frontline care strengthens infection prevention by ensuring cleaning and disinfecting protocols are followed throughout to create a safe work and living environment for staff and residents. It also supports a team-based approach, encouraging shared responsibility and accountability across the organization.

Housekeeping already works closely with other departments to ensure compliance with regulations and to maintain a safe, welcoming environment for residents, visitors and staff. Beyond routine cleaning and disinfection, housekeeping staff are uniquely positioned to recognize potential infection risks and contribute to proactive prevention efforts. By integrating housekeeping into care teams, facilities can align incentives and drive measurable improvements in resident safety, operational efficiency and compliance outcomes across the facility.

Key steps to consider:



Include housekeeping in daily huddles, safety discussions and policy development.



Establish a structured approach to enhance teamwork and collaboration across disciplines. Evidence-based frameworks, such as Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety (TeamSTEPPS), can improve communication and enhance the culture of safety across the organization.⁴



Provide continued training to housekeeping team members to ensure regulatory compliance and stay up to date on the latest housekeeping methods and infection prevention concerns. Education and training should include an understanding of infection prevention, types of common pathogens, how long they survive and how they are spread.^{5,6}

Compliance considerations: Elevating housekeeping staff to frontline care supports a culture of safety that recognizes and supports a robust infection prevention program to meet state and federal requirements that enhance resident and staff safety.⁷

2. Implement robust cleaning protocols.

Implementing robust, evidence-based cleaning protocols is imperative for senior living facilities to protect vulnerable residents and staff and to avoid legal and regulatory fallout. Innovative cleaning protocols go beyond routine surface wiping to include adoption of tools and systems to prioritize high-risk areas, prevent cross-contamination and ensure continuous, real-time monitoring.

Key steps to consider:

-  **Adopt risk-stratified cleaning schedules** to prioritize high-touch surfaces, such as door knobs and railings.⁸
-  **Use color-coded microfiber cloths and tools** to prevent cross-contamination between residents' rooms, bathrooms and common areas.⁹
-  **Follow manufacturers' instructions** for use of cleaning and disinfection products, including proper dilution and contact time.⁸
-  **Incorporate real-time monitoring systems**, such as adenosine triphosphate (ATP) testing and fluorescent markers, to confirm cleaning effectiveness.¹⁰
-  When budget allows, **pilot low-cost digital tools** — like QR code-based checklists — before investing in more advanced systems.
-  **Modify infection control policies** to reflect the need for more frequent cleaning measures during flu season. Use of a general, all-purpose cleaner is recommended in addition to a disinfectant.¹¹

Compliance considerations: These steps help ensure infection prevention duties are carried out consistently and appropriately documented to prepare senior living centers for state and federal audits and support the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's (OSHA's) requirements for providing a safe work environment.

3. Improve facility design and infrastructure.

Senior living facilities can make meaningful improvements to resident safety by adopting thoughtful, cost-effective design and infrastructure improvements that simplify cleaning, limit the spread of pathogens and support staff adherence with infection prevention protocols.

Key steps to consider:

 **Upgrade high-touch surfaces and furnishings.** Use antimicrobial furniture surfaces and flooring in key areas, when possible. Replace frequently touched surfaces such as door knobs, railings and countertops with antimicrobial or easy-to-clean surfaces.¹²

 **Improve ventilation** by adding portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters in high-use areas if system upgrades are not feasible.¹³

 **Rearrange furniture** to minimize crowding, reduce traffic and enhance cleaning efficiency.

Compliance considerations: Thoughtful, low-cost design changes can help reduce the spread of pathogens and support staff in consistently following infection prevention protocols, helping senior living facilities comply with state and federal regulatory standards to minimize potential exposures to pathogens to protect staff and residents.



4. Work smarter with vendor partners to optimize the supply chain.

Procurement and supply chain reliability have evolved from back-office operations to essential elements that directly support staff and resident safety in senior living facilities. Strong vendor partnerships can support supply chain optimization through solutions including just-in-time delivery, data analytics to enable predictive ordering and ensure reliable access to infection prevention products.

Key steps to consider:



Automate ordering for frequently used products.



Prioritize affordable, EPA-approved disinfectants over costly specialty products.¹⁴



Explore partnering for staff education, in-service sessions and bundled product deals.

Compliance considerations: Strong vendor partnerships can help senior living facilities meet CMS and OSHA requirements by securing the provision of EPA-approved disinfectants and tracking product recalls. Maintaining sufficient supplies at all times is considered industry best practice, helping facilities comply with state and federal emergency preparedness regulations while also meeting infection prevention requirements, ensuring staff have the resources needed to support organizational infection control efforts.¹⁵

Summary.

Infection prevention in senior living facilities is both a moral imperative and regulatory necessity. By embedding these strategies into daily operations, senior living facilities can bolster their existing infection prevention programs to create a proactive, sustainable culture of safety. The benefits extend far beyond infection control and include reducing regulatory risk, avoiding costly penalties and fines, improving workforce stability and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents. [Learn more](#) about how Staples Business helps senior living centers reduce infection and improve compliance.

Resources

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