

Standard Precautions

Submitted by Callie Parr and used in cooperation with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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STANDARD PRECAUTIONS for Veterinary Clinics



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Standard precautions are a common practice in the human health care industry and can help minimize the chance of disease spread in the animal health care industry as well. Standard precautions approach infection control with the concept that all blood and body fluids should be treated as if they are infectious. These precautions help prevent disease transmission from staff to patient, patient to patient and patient to staff. Standard precautions include handwashing, barrier protection, limiting contact, disposing of waste appropriately, and cleaning and disinfection protocols.

Handwashing is the single most important measure for reducing the risks of transmitting organisms. Hands should be washed:

- Before and after handling each patient
- After touching blood, body fluids, secretions, excretions and contaminated items, whether or not gloves are worn
- Immediately after gloves are removed
- Between tasks and procedures on the same patient to prevent cross-contamination of different body sites
- After handling laboratory specimens or cultures
- After cleaning cages
- Before meals, breaks, smoking and leaving work for the day
- Before and after using the restroom

The recommended technique for handwashing:

- Wet hands and forearms with warm water
- Add at least 3–5 mLs (1–2 full pumps) of soap to palm of hand
- Lather up and vigorously scrub each side of the hands beyond the wrist for 10-30 seconds, cleaning between fingers, under rings and fingernails
- Rinse under warm water until all soap residue is removed
- Dry hands with paper towel or warm air dryer

- If it is not possible to wash your hands immediately (when working in the field), wet wipes with alcohol or hand sanitizers can be used until you have access to warm water and soap.

Barrier protection should be appropriate for the type of procedures being performed and the type of exposure anticipated. Wear gloves, protective clothing such as lab coat, uniform, apron or coveralls when handling patients known or suspected to be infected with infectious or zoonotic diseases. Washable boots, shoes or shoe covers may protect against infectious material being tracked around a hospital. This applies to working with infected tissues or body fluids, treating a live animal in cages or stalls, cleaning cages occupied by animals with infectious diseases or handling the carcass of an animal that has died of a potential infectious/zoonotic disease. Additional protection in the form of a mask, eye protection or respirators, may be necessary depending on the circumstances and disease.

Limit the staff that comes into contact with infectious animals to only those essential for its care. The fewer the number of individuals exposed the less the risk of disease spread.

Dispose of infectious waste appropriately. Waste should be bagged in the area where it was generated and re-bagged once outside of the infected area.

Properly clean and disinfect contaminated environments.

References:

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention website at www.cdc.gov
- General Biosecurity Guidelines of the Colorado State Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Accessed at <http://bluent.vth.colostate.edu/vth/biosecurity/gengid.htm> on 2-23-04.
- McKelvey D. Safety Handbook for Veterinary Hospital Staff. American Animal Hospital Association Press, 1999.
- Veterinary Practice Consultants: Isolation Protocols. Available at <http://v-p-c.com/phil/osh/isolation.htm> Accessed June 16, 2004.