

INFECTION CONTROL SNAPSHOT

Standard Precautions



Standard precautions: the practice of considering that **all** blood and body fluids might be contaminated with blood and should be treated as infectious. Dental personnel must treat **all** patients as if they were infectious and use the same infection control procedures because patients with bloodborne infections can be asymptomatic or unaware they are infected. Standard precautions must be used for all patient encounters.

- Standard precautions apply to contact with
 - 1) blood;
 - 2) all body fluids, secretions, and excretions (except sweat), regardless of whether they contain blood;
 - 3) nonintact skin; and
 - 4) mucous membranes.

OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogen Standard still uses the term Universal Precautions, however in 1996, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expanded the concept of universal precautions and changed the term to Standard Precautions. Standard precautions integrate and expand the elements of universal precautions into a standard of care designed to protect health-care personnel and patients from pathogens that can be spread by blood or any other body fluid, excretion, or secretion.

Saliva has always been considered a potentially infectious material in dental infection control; thus, no operational difference exists in clinical dental practice between universal precautions and standard precautions.

While most elements of standard precautions evolved from universal precautions that were developed for protection of health-care personnel, in 2007 the CDC added several new elements (respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette and safe injection practices) to standard precautions that focus on protection of patients. These were the result of problems identified during outbreak investigations such as those in 2003 for SARS and various investigations that revealed that the basic principles of aseptic technique for the preparation and administration of parenteral medications were not always being followed.

Elements of Standard Precautions

Reminder: Although standard precautions apply to all patient encounters, the application of standard precautions during patient care is determined by the task being performed and the type of anticipated exposure to blood, body fluid, or pathogens. In other words, infection control policies/practices are determined by the procedure, not the patient.

- Handwashing
- Using personal protective equipment
- Handling contaminated materials/equipment to prevent cross contamination
- Cleaning/disinfecting environmental surfaces
- Using engineering/work practice controls
- Respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette
- Safe injection practices



Just a few things to think about

- Do you use standard precautions for all patient encounters?
- Can you list several examples of each element of standard precautions?

If you want more info

- CDC Guidelines for Infection Control in Dental Health-Care Settings (www.cdc.gov/oralhealth).
- Molinari JA. Infection control: Its evolution to the current standard precautions. J Am Dent Assoc 2003;134:569-574.
- USAF Guidelines for Infection Control in Dentistry (<http://airforcemedicine.afms.mil/decs>).

