

## Infection Control Issues in Physician Offices

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### Introduction

Is coming to see the doctor a hazard to your patients' health? There is a very good chance that respiratory and other organisms are being transmitted in your waiting rooms and offices between patients and staff. Infection control issues are being recognised increasingly as important in all health care settings. This short document outlines some basic strategies and points to further information related to infection control in physician offices.

Two basic routines will help decrease the transmission of disease within all medical offices. Hand washing and encouraging staff and patients to "Cover Your Cough"\* can prevent disease and make the workplace a safer, healthier environment for everyone – patients and clinic staff including physicians, nurses, receptionists, cleaners and their families.

### General Infection Control Framework

The care of any patient (medical, surgical, psychiatric) requires consideration of the risks associated with treatment. As physicians, we make efforts to protect ourselves from patient's blood and body fluids through standard practices but, many times, the risks are not as obvious.

### Personal protection

Immunization against the common vaccine preventable diseases, including annual influenza immunization, is recommended for all health care workers, including physicians and their staff. In addition, there are three transmission routes to be considered when considering infection personal protection from infectious diseases: airborne, droplet and direct contact. The common feature to all of these is adequate hand washing before and after the patient visit, but some of the specifics are listed below:

| Transmission Route | Diseases (examples)   | Precautions recommended   |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Airborne           | Pulmonary TB<br>Disseminated zoster<br>Rubeola (measles)<br>Hemorrhagic fevers<br>Varicella                                 | N95 Mask<br>Eye protection<br>Private Exam Room with closed door<br>Hand washing            |
| Droplets           | Influenza<br>Meningococcal meningitis<br>Mumps/ Rubella/ Pertussis<br>Invasive group A streptococcus                        | Surgical mask<br>Eye protection<br>Hand washing   |
| Direct Contact     | Infectious diarrhea<br>C. difficile<br>Hepatitis A, E/ HSV<br>Scabies<br>Varicella Zoster<br>Antibiotic Resistant Organisms | Gloves<br>Fluid resistant gown (if splashes of body fluids are anticipated)<br>Hand washing |

Adapted from: Health Canada CCDR 25S4 (1999)

### ***Environmental protection***

An environment safe from the risks associated with infectious diseases should be available to all patients and persons working within the clinic environment. Things to consider may be:

- Utilization of disposable equipment whenever feasible
- Cleaning of shared equipment used for patient contact
  - For example: stethoscopes, BP cuffs, keyboard, pen, lab coat
- Having facilities available for hand washing before and after patient contact
  - Having hand wash stations for patients as well
- Holding staff-wide meetings to ensure proper training of infection control practices
- Modelling good practices to patients, staff and trainees

### ***Special Consideration:***

The sterilization of necessary equipment must be completed as per the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta guidelines in a manner that is appropriate for the equipment used. It is best practice to ensure that the seal is intact on the sterile package prior to use and that the processing date be checked.

### **More information**

There are several available resources to help guide practitioners in implementing appropriate infection control practices within the physician office. A list of suggested documents and websites is appended.

#### *Bibliography*

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<http://www.capitalhealth.ca/AboutUs/ResourceLibrary/Other/CoverYourCough/default>

Capital Health's link to Communicable Disease Control is available at:

[http://www.capitalhealth.ca/AboutUs/OurOrganization/PublicHealthDivision/Communicable\\_Disease\\_Control](http://www.capitalhealth.ca/AboutUs/OurOrganization/PublicHealthDivision/Communicable_Disease_Control)

Communicable Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia is available at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm>

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