

Standard Precautions

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are Standard Precautions?

Standard Precautions (*previously known as "Universal Precautions"*) are guidelines designed to prevent transmission of *infections from viruses and bacteria that can be found in blood and body fluids* such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Methicillin Resistant Staph Aureus (MRSA). Standard Precautions apply to *blood, other body fluids containing visible blood, semen, and vaginal secretions*. Standard Precautions also apply to tissues and to fluids such as cerebrospinal (brain), synovial (between joints), pleural (around lungs), peritoneal (around abdomen), pericardial (around heart) and amniotic (around the fetus in utero).

2. Are there situations in which Standard Precautions do not apply?

Yes. Standard Precautions do **not** apply to feces, nasal secretions, sputum, sweat, tears, urine, breast milk and vomit unless they contain visible blood. Standard precautions do not apply to saliva except when visibly contaminated with blood.

3. What precautions should be used as protection from contact with bodily fluids?

- a. Wear disposable gloves to prevent possible exposure to blood-borne viruses when cleaning body fluid spills containing blood or if your hands or fingers have cuts.
- b. Do **not** allow family members to share toothbrushes or razors.
- c. Avoid placing your fingers in any child's mouth and discourage others from doing this.

4. Why is proper handwashing crucial to protect against germs?

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infection and illness. Handwashing is simple and it's the best way to prevent infection and illness. Keeping hands clean prevents illness at home, at school, and at work. Handwashing can prevent infection and illness from spreading from family member to family member and, sometimes, throughout a community.

The basic rule is to wash hands before preparing food and after handling uncooked meat and poultry, before eating, after changing diapers, after coughing, sneezing, or blowing one's nose into a tissue, after using the bathroom, and after touching animals or anything in the animal's environment.

5. What process should be used for effective handwashing?

When washing hands with soap and water:

- a. Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water if it is available.
- b. Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- c. Continue rubbing hands for 15-20 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing "Happy Birthday" twice through to a friend.
- d. Rinse hands well under running water.
- e. Dry your hands with a paper towel or air dryer and use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.
- f. Always use soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.

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If soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub to clean your hands. Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of germs on skin and are fast-acting.

When washing hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- a. Apply product to the palm of one hand.
- b. Rub hands together.
- c. Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.

6. What protective barriers should be used to reduce risk of transmission?

Protective barriers include gloves, gowns, aprons, masks, or protective eyewear, which can reduce the risk of exposure to potentially infective materials. Gloves help prevent contamination, but wearing gloves does not eliminate the need to wash hands. Wash your hands when the gloves are removed because gloves may have small holes in them and bacteria multiply rapidly in the warm environment of the glove. Hands are often contaminated from the outside of the gloves when removing the gloves.

Note: Latex gloves are not commonly used currently because of the growing issue of latex allergy. Instead of latex gloves, vinyl gloves should be used.

7. What precautions should be used for proper handling of needles?

- a. To prevent needle stick injuries, needles should not be recapped by hand, purposely bent or broken by hand, removed from disposable syringes, or otherwise manipulated by hand;
- b. After they are used, disposable syringes and needles and other sharp items should be placed in puncture-resistant containers for disposal;
- c. The puncture-resistant containers should be located close to the use area; and
- d. All reusable needles should be placed in a puncture-resistant container for reprocessing.

8. What precautions should be used when cleaning the home and washing clothes, dishes, and toys?

- a. Wash dishes in hot soapy water or in the dishwasher, if you have one. It is not necessary to keep a high-risk child's dishes separate.
- b. Thorough cleaning with soap and water followed by a disinfecting process should always be the first line of defense against germs. Allow the disinfecting solution to air dry on the surface for continued effectiveness. If the surface cannot be air dried, leave the disinfectant for at least three minutes before drying.
- c. Be careful not to get any of the body fluid in your eyes, nose, mouth, or any open wounds or sores. If this does happen, scrub the affected area liberally with soap and warm water
- d. You may wash clothing with other family laundry in the washing machine or by hand, using hot soapy water.
- e. Toys that have been in a child's mouth should not be shared with others until they are washed.
- f. Wash plastic toys that have been soiled with body fluids in hot soapy water.
- g. Wash stuffed toys in the washing machine or in hot soapy water.
- h. Wash cloth diapers in a washing machine or hot soapy water with a small amount of bleach.
- i. Clean any surfaces containing body fluid spills with one part bleach to ten parts water.

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9. What precautions should be used with soiled diapers?

- a. Place soiled diapers in a diaper pail lined with a plastic bag. Keep these in an area where small children do not have access to them. Securely tie the bag and dispose of it with other household trash.
- b. You do **not** have to wear gloves for diaper changing unless there is diarrhea (blood may be present) or a bleeding diaper rash. Wash hands before and after diapering. Place the gloves and cleaning materials in a plastic bag, tie securely, and dispose of the bag with other household trash.

10. What resource is available for additional information regarding precautions?

For more information on precautions, handwashing and other issues:

- a. Please call 1-800-CDC-INFO 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- b. Send an email to cdcinfo@cdc.gov; or
- c. Visit www.cdc.gov.

References:

The Centers for Disease Control: Standard Precautions for Prevention of Transmission of HIV and Other Bloodborne Infection http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/bp_Standard_precautions.html
<http://www.cdcinfo@cdc.gov>
http://www.mass.gov/Eoohhs2/docs/dmr/mrsa_standard_precaution.pdf;
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