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COVID-19: Infection prevention and control for veterinary practitioners

The primary source of SARS-COV-2 transmission remains human-to-human contact.

At this stage there is no evidence that dogs can play a role in the spread of this human disease, or that they become sick. However, this is a good opportunity to remember all the things we can do to keep ourselves, other practice members, clients and patients safe from diseases.

What can I do to keep myself, other practice members, clients and patients safe?

- Practice good hand hygiene. This is one of the most important infection prevention and control practices that you can perform to protect yourself, your staff, your patients and your clients.
 - Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) is the gold standard for hand hygiene, in the absence of organic material. ABHRs containing 60-80% alcohol are the most effective.
 - Liquid soap should be used when hands are visibly dirty or organic material may be present.
 - Use single use paper towels and dispose of after use.
 - Do not use multi-use cloth hand towels. Remove these from your clinic.
 - Do not use cakes of soap.
 - Perform your regular surgical scrub.
- Make sure that you have alcohol-based hand rub at key points around your clinic – at the reception desk, waiting room, beside phones, in consultation rooms, near cages – i.e. make sure they are accessible.
- Rubbing ABHR into your hands should take about 20 seconds (try singing the Happy Birthday song twice).

When should I perform hand hygiene when looking after animals?

- Before and after touching a patient – this includes patting animals
- Before and after doing a procedure or where there is body fluid risk, such as after inserting an IV catheter, taking a temperature, after giving a subcutaneous injection, including vaccinations
- After touching an animal's surroundings – such as opening or closing a cage door, writing on a cage chart hanging on the cage or adjusting rates on IV pumps.

When should I perform hand hygiene in the course of my day?

- Before and after eating or drinking
- After blowing your nose or coughing
- After going to the toilet (wash your hands)
- After smoking

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Do I need to wear gloves all the time?

- NO!
- Gloves provide additional protection with high risk activities such as exposure to blood or bodily fluids. This may include oral examinations.
- Hand hygiene should be performed BEFORE gloves are put on and AFTER gloves are removed.

What cleaning do I need to perform?

- Environmental cleaning is important in reducing the transmission of pathogens.
- Pay attention to frequently touched objects such as door handles, light switches, computers, keyboards, ABHR dispensers, IV poles, fridge handles, microwave handles.
- Ensure that any equipment used on patients, such as blood pressure cuffs, probes, thermometers, are cleaned and disinfected according to manufacturer's directions, after use.
- Check the dilution rate and contact time for veterinary disinfectants that you use.
- Clean and disinfect your consultation table between every patient. Make sure that the required contact time has been reached before placing another animal on the table.
- Clean and disinfect the walls in your consultation room / treatment when required.

What if someone is pregnant or immunosuppressed?

- Practice good hand hygiene as mentioned above.
- Practice contact precautions – prevent contact with faeces and other bodily fluids.
- Avoid caring for high risk animals.
- Make sure that a manager is aware

What else can I do to keep myself, other practice members and clients safe?

- Do not come to work if you are experiencing flu-like symptoms, particularly coughing or sore throat.
- Do not eat or drink where patients are located.
- Practice cough etiquette – cough into your elbow if necessary and perform hand hygiene after.
- Institute a no shaking hands policy in the clinic – put up signage so that clients are aware also
- Avoid touching your face, especially eyes, nose and mouth
- Check that you and fellow staff are performing hand hygiene properly – encourage each other to do the right thing.
- Use other personal protective equipment as required

Hand hygiene posters

- <https://www.who.int/gpsc/tools/GPSC-HandRub-Wash.pdf>
- <https://www.hha.org.au/component/jdownloads/send/5-local-implementation/75-poster-who-1?Itemid=0>
- <https://www.hha.org.au/component/jdownloads/send/5-local-implementation/76-poster-who-2?Itemid=0>

Standard Precautions

- <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Approach-4-Standard-Precautions-Icon-PDF-672KB.pdf>
- <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Approach-4-Contact-Precautions-Icon-PDF-654KB.pdf>

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Standard, Contact, Droplet and Airborne precautions posters

- https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library?resource_search=precautions

References

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. 5 Moments in hand hygiene: Commonwealth of Australia; 2019.

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare National Health and Medical Research Council,; 2019. p. 362.

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