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— GUIDELINE —

# Infection Prevention and Control in Outpatient and Ambulatory Care Settings



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## Introduction

Outbreaks of infection were traditionally associated with hospitals, but in recent years the delivery of care has increasingly shifted toward ambulatory and community-based settings.

As a result, outbreaks and other infection-related adverse events have been identified in outpatient facilities, including medical and dental practices and ambulatory surgery centers. In many of these outbreaks, breakdowns in basic infection prevention procedures were associated with these events.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it is critical that every outpatient or ambulatory care setting – whether it is a solo provider practice, an outpatient clinic, a specialty-specific office, an ambulatory surgery center, or a healthcare facility where patients receive clinical care (but do not remain overnight) – implement an infection prevention and control plan.

## Objectives

The objectives of this guideline are to:

- Provide guidance on how to use two essential resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct an infection prevention self-evaluation
- Summarize infection control recommendations from the CDC for consideration in outpatient and ambulatory settings
- Offer various resources on infection prevention and control to help healthcare providers and personnel establish and maintain their infection control plans

## Developing an Infection Prevention and Control Plan

As a first step in implementing an infection prevention and control plan, each outpatient organization should consider obtaining CDC's *Guide to Infection Prevention for Outpatient Settings: Minimum Expectations for Safe Care* and its corresponding checklist.

Appropriate healthcare providers and personnel should read the guide and use the checklist to conduct a self-evaluation. The guide is categorized by key recommendations for various aspects of infection prevention and control, such as education and training of healthcare

personnel, hand hygiene, personal protective equipment, and safe injection practices. Similarly, the checklist is divided into key topic areas that correspond to the guide's recommendations.

Healthcare providers and personnel should identify the sections of the guide that are relevant to their specific setting, and then refer to the appropriate sections within the checklist to conduct a self-evaluation. The CDC's guide and checklist provide physicians, dentists, healthcare professionals, and other healthcare personnel with a method to assess their organizations, as well as a number of evidence-based resources to review.

Another helpful CDC publication that applies to all healthcare settings is the *Guideline for Isolation Precautions: Preventing Transmission of Infectious Agents in Healthcare Settings*. This comprehensive document covers the elements needed to prevent transmission of infectious agents as well as the precautions to prevent transmission, and recommendations also are presented.

In addition to the guidelines and checklist, the CDC, along with the Safety Injection Practices Coalition, lead the *One & Only Campaign*, a public health effort to raise awareness among patients and healthcare providers about safe injection practices. The campaign aims to eliminate infections resulting from unsafe injection practices. Providers may [download campaign materials](#) that include targeted educational materials and messages to increase awareness of infections.

## Key Elements of an Infection Prevention and Control Plan

The following guidance is a summary list of the issues identified in the aforementioned CDC publications. When assessing infection prevention and control plans for outpatient facilities, healthcare providers and personnel should consider whether these factors have been addressed.

- **Administrative support.** Does the organization have:
  - Written infection prevention policies and procedures, which are assessed at least annually or according to state and/or federal requirements?

- Trained leadership in infection prevention and control?
- Adequate and readily available supplies?
- Employee training and competency validation upon hire and at least annually or according to state and/or federal requirements?
- Annual assessments and documentation of compliance with infection prevention policies and procedures?
- **Occupational health.** Does the organization require:
  - Adherence to Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) bloodborne pathogen standards?
  - Implementation of postexposure evaluation and follow-up plans?
  - Hepatitis B vaccination for employees at risk of occupational exposure?
  - Annual influenza vaccination for all healthcare personnel?
  - Tuberculosis (TB) screening upon hire for healthcare personnel at risk for exposure, as well as annually if required by state law or the facility's **TB risk assessment**?
  - Other vaccinations as required by local and state laws?
  - A respiratory protection program and annual respiratory fit testing for appropriate healthcare personnel?
  - Written protocols for preventing and managing job-related and community-acquired infections in healthcare personnel?
- **Surveillance and disease reporting.** Does the organization require:
  - Maintenance of an updated list of reportable diseases?
  - Compliance with mandatory reporting requirements?
- **Hand hygiene.** Does the organization have:
  - Adequate and readily accessible supplies (e.g., soap, water, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rub)?

- Healthcare personnel education regarding appropriate hand hygiene techniques?
- A hand hygiene surveillance program to monitor and improve compliance that includes written policies and documentation of compliance?
- **Personal protective equipment.** Does the organization provide:
  - Sufficient and appropriate personal protective equipment (gloves, gown, mask, eye protection, face shield) for staff?
  - Training on proper selection and use of protective equipment?
- **Injection safety.** Does the organization require:
  - Limited utilization of multidose vials and selection of appropriate vial sizes based on facility needs?
  - Appropriate preparation of injections using aseptic technique?
  - Adherence to CDC's **One & Only Campaign** principles?
- **Respiratory hygiene.** Does the organization ensure:
  - Appropriate management of patients with respiratory symptoms?
  - Provision of adequate supplies in appropriate locations (e.g., tissues, no-touch receptacles, face masks, etc.)?
  - Adequate education on preventing the spread of respiratory pathogens when examining and caring for patients?
- **Environmental cleaning.** Does the organization have:
  - Written policies and procedures for environmental cleaning?
  - Job-specific training and competency validation for environmental services staff at hire and when policies/procedures change?
  - Protocols for periodic assessment of cleaning procedures to ensure adequacy and consistency?
  - Policies for the appropriate use of personal protective equipment?
  - Decontamination procedures for blood spills or body fluid spills?



- **Reprocessing of reusable medical devices.** Does the organization provide:
  - Clear differentiation between reusable and single-use devices?
  - Written policies and procedures for reprocessing reusable devices?
  - Policies, procedures, and manufacturer’s reprocessing instructions for reusable medical devices in reprocessing areas?
  - Training and competency validation for employees processing reusable medical devices, both annually and when new equipment is introduced?
  - Guidance for the appropriate use of personal protective equipment?
- **Sterilization of reusable instruments and devices.** Does the organization require:
  - Appropriate cleaning, decontamination, and sterilization of reusable critical instruments?
  - Routine maintenance for sterilization equipment according to manufacturer instructions?
  - Routine biological monitoring of the process?
  - Written policies and procedures for managing a reprocessing error/failure?
- **High-level disinfection of reusable instruments and devices.** Does the organization require:
  - At least high-level disinfection for reusable semi-critical instruments?
  - A system for identifying which instrument was used on which patient?
  - Routine maintenance for high-level disinfection equipment according to manufacturer instructions?

A list of resources that offers additional information about establishing and maintaining an infection prevention and control program appears following the conclusion of this publication. The CDC’s guide also offers a list of resources. Although some duplication may exist, these resources should address the needs of a wide variety of healthcare facilities.

## Conclusion

Infection outbreaks are no longer a concern for only hospitals and inpatient facilities. Infection-related adverse events also represent a serious safety issue for outpatient and ambulatory care settings, such as medical and dental practices, ambulatory surgery centers, and clinics.

To manage these possible risks, healthcare providers and personnel in these practice settings should develop and implement infection prevention and control plans. The CDC's detailed guidance can assist these individuals in assessing and evaluating their current policies and protocols and implementing strategies to prevent breakdowns in basic infection prevention procedures.

## Resources

- [American Dental Association: Oral Health Topics: Infection Control](#)
- [Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology: APIC Position Paper: Safe Injection, Infusion, and Medication Vial Practices in Health Care](#)
- [Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology: Guide to Hand Hygiene Programs for Infection Prevention](#)
- [Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology: Preventing Infection in Ambulatory Care](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Guideline for Disinfection and Sterilization in Healthcare Facilities, 2008](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Guideline for Hand Hygiene in Health-Care Settings](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Guideline for Isolation Precautions: Preventing Transmission of Infectious Agents in Healthcare Settings \(2007\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Health-Care Facilities](#)

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Immunization of Health-Care Personnel: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Injection Safety
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Summary of Infection Prevention Practices in Dental Settings: Basic Expectations for Safe Care
- Organization for Safety, Asepsis and Prevention
- The Joint Commission: Measuring Hand Hygiene Adherence: Overcoming the Challenges
- World Health Organization: Hand Hygiene Monitoring and Feedback

## **Endnote**

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs). Retrieved from [www.cdc.gov/HAI/settings/outpatient/outpatient-care-guidelines.html](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/settings/outpatient/outpatient-care-guidelines.html)

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