

Isolation Precautions in the Inpatient Setting



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KEYWORDS

- Standard precautions • Transmission-based precautions
- Droplet, airborne, contact precautions • Infectious disease transmission
- Hospital-acquired infections

HOSPITAL MEDICINE CLINICS CHECKLIST

1. Standard precautions are the hygienic measures applied to the care of all patients in health care settings regardless of the presence of infectious pathogens.
2. Transmission-based precautions are implemented for those patients who are known or suspected to be infected or colonized with an infectious agent, and therefore require additional control measures to effectively prevent transmission.
3. Transmission-based precautions should be applied empirically based on clinical suspicion and presence of defined disease processes associated with pathogenic organisms, while confirmatory tests are pending.
4. The most common indication for airborne precautions is suspicion for *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, or primary or disseminated varicella zoster in an immunocompromised host.
5. The most common indications for droplet precautions are upper respiratory infections concerning for viral causes, or bacterial infections, including *Neisseria meningitidis* or *Haemophilus influenzae*.

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6. The most common indications for contact precautions are *Clostridium difficile* infection, colonization or infection with multidrug-resistant organisms, or excessive bodily secretions.
7. The duration of precaution use is determined by known activity and shedding of pathogens, and in most cases precautions are used for the duration of the illness.
8. A longer duration of droplet precaution use should be considered for immunocompromised patients given prolonged periods of viral shedding.
9. Isolation precautions should be discontinued in a timely manner as appropriate, because they can have a negative impact on patient care, patient experience, and adverse events.
10. Use of contact precautions to prevent infection by multidrug-resistant organisms has been shown to be cost-effective in a variety of health care settings.

DEFINITIONS*How are standard precautions defined?*

Standard precautions are the hygienic measures applied to the care of all patients in health care settings, regardless of suspected or confirmed presence of an infectious agent. Evidence shows that hands of health care personnel may transmit pathogens from one infected or colonized site or patient to another. In addition, shared patient care devices and instruments can also transmit pathogens if not properly sterilized. For this reason, every patient interaction should include use of standard precautions, as listed in **Box 1**.¹

Hand hygiene is an essential component of standard precautions, and can be performed either with soap and water or alcohol-based products. Alcohol-based products are preferred as long as there is no visible soiling of the hands, because they have superior microcidal activity, reduced skin drying properties, and are more convenient.¹ In addition, nail length and type can affect hand hygiene efficacy, because nails can harbor bacterial organisms and yeast, so artificial or unkempt nails should be discouraged in the health care setting.¹

Box 1**Elements of standard precautions**

Use of protective barriers

Proper hand hygiene

Disposal of hazardous waste

Cleaning contaminated surfaces

Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette

Safe injection practices

Use of masks for lumbar puncture or contact with cerebrospinal fluid

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