



Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is specialized clothing or equipment worn for protection against a hazard.¹ The primary PPE used in dental offices includes gloves, masks, protective eyewear, face shields and protective apparel (e.g., gowns and jackets).

The selection of appropriate PPE requires judgment based on the procedure being performed and the possibility of exposure. In selecting PPE, the goal should be to prevent blood or other potentially infectious materials from reaching the individual's street clothes or undergarments, skin, eyes, mouth or other mucous membranes. PPE should be changed when it becomes visibly soiled and removed immediately, or as soon as feasible, if it is penetrated by blood or other potentially infectious fluids. All PPE should be removed before leaving the work area. **General work clothes (e.g., uniforms, shirts, blouses) that are worn outside the work area are not considered PPE.**

Below are some special considerations in selecting PPE for the dental office. Hospitals have their own infection control protocols, and hospital-based dentists should follow these when treatment patients in hospital settings.

Masks, Protective Eyewear and Faceshields. Masks in combination with protective eyewear (such as goggles or prescription eyewear with side shields) should be worn whenever splashes, spray, spatter or droplets of blood or other potentially infectious materials may be generated. A mask also should be worn when using a face shield. **A properly worn mask should cover the mouth and nose.**

The CDC has suggested specific PPE recommendations for dental health care workers who are treating patients at increased risk for infectious respiratory diseases such as active tuberculosis and [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome \(SARS\)](#).

Gloves. Gloves should be worn whenever hand contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials is likely to occur. Since saliva is considered a potentially infectious material, this means gloves will be used in almost all patient procedures. Gloves also should be worn when touching contaminated items or surfaces.

- Don't reuse single use, disposable gloves
- Replace gloves if they become torn or punctured or their ability to function as a barrier is compromised
- Use utility gloves for clean-up activities
- Surgical gloves

Some dental healthcare workers have developed hypersensitivity to proteins derived from natural rubber latex used in certain medical and dental devices, including examination and surgical gloves. These workers should use PPE made of an alternative material. For more



American Dental Association
www.ada.org

information on recognizing and responding to latex allergies in the dental office, go to http://www.ada.org/public/topics/latex_allergy.asp.

Gowns and Other Protective Clothing. For most dental procedures, a gown, lab coat or clinic jacket will be sufficient to cover areas of the body exposed to blood or other potentially infectious material. The fabric and style selected will depend on the task and degree of exposure anticipated. Remember that splashes and sprays can travel some distance from the patient's mouth to land on exposed areas.

Laundry. Although issues related to laundry are not discussed in the CDC infection control guidelines, OSHA does require employers to launder or clean any reusable personal protective equipment contaminated with blood, saliva, or other infectious material.² When doing so, employers should ensure that those who handle contaminated laundry use appropriate infection control measures to prevent the spread of disease. For example,

- Personal Protective Equipment should be used when handling laundry.
- Contaminated gowns and other personal protective equipment should be properly red-bagged or labeled when stored in the office or transported to a laundromat.

Document created January 2004
© 2004 American Dental Association

References

1 <http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/infectioncontrol/glossary.htm>

2 OSHA, Bloodborne pathogens-1910.1030