STANDARD PRECAUTIONS FOR AUDIOLOGY

The clinician is to assume that every client is a potential carrier of an infectious disease. To prevent the transmission of blood-borne pathogens and other potentially infectious body substances and to protect the health of clients receiving audiologic services, of health and education workers, and of family members and significant others, the ASHA-Recommended Standard Precautions must be followed.

1. **BLOOD AND BODY FLUIDS** from ALL clients should be handled as though they were infectious. Waste that is contaminated by blood, ear drainage, or cerumen can be placed in a regular trash receptacle unless the amount of body substance is significant. Wastes containing significant amounts of body substances must be disposed of in an impermeable bag or container labeled for biohazardous material. All other wastes, including gloves can be thrown in a regular waste container.

2. The single most important activity that limits the spread of infectious substances is regular, thorough handwashing. **HANDS** should always be washed before and after contact with clients. Hands should be washed even when gloves have been used. If hands come in contact with blood or body fluids, they should be immediately washed with soap and water. Hands should also be washed after sneezing, coughing, or wiping a nose.

   **Follow the basic handwashing technique:**

   ✷ Remove all rings and put them in a safe place while washing hands;
   ✷ Using a liquid antibacterial soap, lather your hands. Scrub the palms, backs of the hands, wrists, and forearms under running water, using vigorous mechanical action. Also clean under the fingernails and between the fingers;
   ✷ Thoroughly rinse the hands under running water;
   ✷ Use a duration of 30 seconds between clients, if not grossly contaminated, and in handling client devices;
   ✷ Use a duration of 60 seconds when in contact with clients, devices, or equipment with contamination;
   ✷ Thoroughly dry the hands by blotting with a paper or disposable towel to help eliminate germs.

   In the event that the clinician cannot access soap and water, a waterless antiseptic cleanser is available in the Audiologic Suite for cleaning hands. The clinician should follow the guidelines for duration given above.

3. **GLOVES** should be worn when contact with blood, body fluids containing visible blood, mucous membranes or non-intact skin of clients is anticipated. Gloves should be worn on the hand(s) that will come in contact with the blood or body fluid containing visible blood, or for handling items or surfaces soiled with blood or body fluids. Change gloves after contact with each client. Care should be taken so that the clinician does not touch the contaminated portion of the glove.
To safely remove gloves use the following procedure:

- Peel off one glove from the wrist to the fingertip;
- Grasp it in the gloved hand;
- Using the bare hand, peel off the second glove from the inside, tucking the first glove inside the second glove as it is removed.
- Wash hands after gloves are removed.

Gloves are found throughout the Audiologic Suite.

4. Decontamination, cleaning, disinfecting, and sterilization of multiple-use **EQUIPMENT**, including **eartips** and **specula**, should be carried out after use. Eartips and specula are placed in a chemical-sterilization solution immediately following use. They remain in the solution for at least one hour. They are then rinsed, air-dried, and stored. Gloves, goggles, and a protective gown must be worn when handling the cleaning solutions.

**Audiometer earphones** and **test materials** not contaminated by blood or body fluids need not be clean after each use. Earphones should be cleaned daily with a cleansing towelette. **Toys** are disinfected when they have been used in the testing situation.

**Tabletops** and **furniture** in the Audiologic Suite will be cleaned with a disinfectant as needed.

**Hearing aids** must be received from the client in a disinfectant towelette or a gloved hand. Using a disinfectant towelette, wipe the hearing aid and earmold over all surfaces. **A hearing instrument stethoscope** may only be used on an instrument that has been disinfected properly.

Any equipment that comes in contact with blood or body fluids should be cleaned with a 1:10 dilution of bleach and water and sterilized.

*The above information is based on the article "AIDS/HIV: Implications for Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists" from ASHA, December 1990 and on information from the book *Infection Control for the Professions of Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology*.**