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INTRODUCTION

Infection control is an integral part of health care practice and is important in every patient encounter. Infection control measures reduce the risk of transmission of infectious microorganisms through standard precautions that include hand-washing and gloving, masks and respiratory protection, gowns, patient placement and equipment cleaning.

This guideline has been developed to assist staff in taking appropriate action to prevent transmission of infectious microorganisms during telemedicine consultations. This document does not detail standard, universal precautions, but rather focuses on issues that may arise in the telemedicine environment and that require particular attention. Individuals engaging in telemedicine consultations should follow their organizational policies and procedures for accommodating patients who have infectious diseases¹.

GUIDELINE

Operational considerations for staff

Locate your infection control policy if you are unclear as to how to accommodate infectious patients or have questions.

Scheduling considerations to accommodate presence of infectious patient

Notify NH FHT when, at the time of booking, a patient is known to be infectious. Schedule an infectious patient for the last appointment time when booking consecutive patients at a single site. Build time around the actual consultation to allow for studio preparation and clean up.

Identify ahead of time if dressing changes will be required. Ask if the Consultant anticipates there to be specific dressing materials needed or specific methods for handling the materials, and if so, forward this information to the referring site.

If the patient was recently discharged from hospital and is being seen in follow-up, the Infection Control Practitioners at the consulting site may be able to provide additional information or guidance.

Studio/ Telemedicine room considerations



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Use furniture that you can wipe clean. Avoid fabric covered chairs. Ensure that routine procedures for cleaning and disinfection of furniture and surfaces are followed carefully and applied before the studio is used for other patients. Dispose of soiled dressings, waste and linen immediately following the consultation as per your institutional policy.

Telemedicine equipment considerations

Patient care telemedicine equipment should be handled in a manner that prevents contamination of clothing, skin and mucous membrane exposures, and transfer of microorganisms to other patients.

Any equipment that will come into contact with skin must be cleaned before it is used. Equipment that comes into contact with the patient (i.e., general examination camera, stethoscope, ENT scope and illumination source, etc.) should be adequately washed and disinfected between patients and after use.

Follow specific manufacturer manuals and/or organizational protocols for cleaning and disinfection of equipment.

Cleaning information for medical peripheral devices can be found in the user manuals.

Single use items like the general examination camera 50x zoom lens disposable tip covers and the ENT scope disposable specula should be properly discarded. The use of a cover is not a substitute for cleaning and disinfection. Equipment for which a cover is used during procedures must be cleaned and disinfected as appropriate after each use.

LATEX ALERT: Some Disposable Tip Covers for the general examination camera contain natural rubber latex. Individuals who use or are considering using these tip covers should refer to their organizational policies concerning use of latex products and latex allergies.

Cited from OTN accessed Jan 2009 www.otn.ca

¹ Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation (2006). Telehealth Supplementary Criteria.