

# PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is a vital tool in infection control. The purpose of PPE is to reduce the risk of contamination of personal clothing, reduce exposure of skin and mucous membranes of veterinary personnel to pathogens, and reduce transmission of pathogens between patients by veterinary personnel. There is no clinical situation in which some form of PPE should not be worn, as they will all involve contact between animals and the environment. The use of gloves and apron do not constitute PPE, and practices need to consider this aspect of staff and patient care seriously.

Each situation should be considered individually, taking into consideration the basic principles of infectious disease control, the specific clinic environment, the animal, personnel, procedure being performed, and importantly, the suspected infectious disease. Personal protective outerwear is used to protect veterinary personnel and to reduce the risk of pathogen transmission by clothing to patients, owners, veterinary personnel and the public. Protective outerwear should be worn whenever there may be contact with an animal or when working in the clinical environment (including cleaning).



## Non-sterile gowns

Gowns are particularly useful as they provide more of a barrier against contamination than a lab coat or an apron. Impermeable gowns should be worn whenever there is concern regarding contamination with large quantities of body fluids. Permeable gowns can be used for general care of patients in isolation. Disposable gowns should not be reused, and if fabric gowns are used they should be washed after use on every patient. If staff attempt to reuse contaminated gowns, or even aprons, this will lead to contamination of personnel and the environment. The correct procedure for the removal of gowns should also be adhered to:

- After unfastening or breaking the ties, peel the gown from the shoulders and arms by pulling on the chest surface while hands are still gloved.
- Ball up the gown for disposal while keeping the contaminated surface on the inside.
- Remove gloves and wash hands.
- If body fluids soaked through the gown, promptly remove the contaminated underlying clothing and wash the skin.

## Hats/caps

Disposable hats or caps should be worn in aseptic theatre environments, when handling some infectious cases and with barrier nursing. This helps prevent contamination of the scalp and hair, which could lead to dissemination of organisms.

## Footwear

See staff attire protocol.

## Face and Respiratory Protection

Theatre suits, or scrubs, are commonly worn within veterinary clinics as a basic form of PPE. Theatre suits are useful as they are durable and easy to clean, and their use prevents contamination of non-practice clothing. Ideally clinic scrubs should not be worn outside of the workplace, nor should they be taken home by personnel. They should be washed on-site at the end of the day, or whenever contaminated (see staff attire protocol).

Designated theatre suits should always be worn whenever in theatre. Staff should avoid wearing these suits outside of theatre and/or for other tasks. Where necessary, these should be covered with an over-coat (e.g. lab coat, or theatre gown) when outside of the theatre suite.