



BELLA MOSS
FOUNDATION

How do you Assess the Hygiene Status of your Veterinary Facility



Assessing practice hygiene risks in a veterinary facility is a critical component of infection control and overall patient and staff safety and should be conducted unannounced, on a regular (typically monthly) basis. Identifying and addressing potential hygiene risks helps to prevent nosocomial infections, maintain a clean and safe environment, and ensure the proper care of animals. A thorough hygiene risk assessment involves reviewing multiple aspects of the facility, procedures and personnel practices. Here's a comprehensive guide on how to assess the hygiene risks in a veterinary facility:



Staff Training Material





Evaluate the Facility Layout and Zoning

> SEPARATION OF CLEAN AND DIRTY AREAS

Ensure that there is a clear distinction between clean areas (e.g. examination rooms, surgery suites) and dirty areas (e.g. isolation rooms, treatment areas, waste disposal zones). Cross-contamination between these zones should be minimised.

> FLOW OF ANIMALS AND PERSONNEL

The layout should support a one-way flow for animals and personnel. Animals should not be moved through clean areas after being in dirty areas. Personnel should also be aware of the movement between zones and should follow protocols for changing PPE when transitioning.

> ISOLATED HIGH-RISK ZONES

High-risk areas such as surgery suites, intensive care units (ICU) or isolation rooms should be isolated from other areas. Ensure that these zones are equipped with appropriate air filtration systems and that the layout minimises the risk of cross-contamination from other parts of the facility.



Assess Cleaning Protocols and Frequency

> SURFACE AND EQUIPMENT CLEANING

Review cleaning protocols for surfaces, including floors, countertops, cages and exam tables. Are the surfaces being cleaned regularly with appropriate disinfectants? Ensure that high-touch areas (e.g. door handles, light switches, computer keyboards) are cleaned frequently, use ATP testing or alternate affordable, quantitative, patient side testing with rapid result availability.

> EQUIPMENT STERILISATION

Review how medical equipment (e.g. surgical instruments, stethoscopes, thermometers) is sterilised and disinfected. Are autoclaves, sterilizers, and other cleaning equipment functioning properly? Do staff follow proper sterilisation protocols?

> WASTE DISPOSAL

Assess how contaminated materials (e.g. surgical waste, soiled bedding, used bandages) are disposed of. Are there clearly designated areas for handling medical and animal waste? Are waste containers appropriately labelled and securely closed to prevent exposure?





Review Infection Control Procedures

> HAND HYGIENE

Evaluate the availability and usage of hand hygiene stations. There should be no potential to touch an animal or any item of contaminated waste in any room in which you are unable to sanitise your hands before opening the door. Are staff regularly washing their hands or using hand sanitisers, particularly after handling animals, cleaning, or touching contaminated surfaces? Are handwashing stations well-stocked with soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitisers? Good practice indicates that peer-on-peer hand-washing audits are conducted in all areas on a monthly basis.

> PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Assess the use of PPE, such as gloves, masks, gowns, and face shields. Are staff trained in the proper use and disposal of PPE? Do they understand when these are required, such as during surgery, while handling infectious animals, or when cleaning contaminated areas?

> BARRIERS TO INFECTION SPREAD

Look for barriers such as disposable drapes, covers for exam tables, and protective gear for staff that reduce the risk of direct contact with contaminated surfaces or animals. Are these barriers regularly replaced or cleaned?



Inspect Ventilation and Air Quality

> AIRFLOW AND FILTRATION

Evaluate the facility's ventilation system. Are there mechanisms in place (e.g. exhaust fans, HEPA filters) to control the flow of air and reduce the spread of airborne pathogens? Clean filtered air should be introduced into surgical areas, isolation rooms, and recovery areas from where air flows to less critical areas, to maintain cleanliness. Filtered air should be introduced into clean areas (e.g. theatres) and exhausted from contaminated areas (e.g. wards and laboratories) to ensure that air is always passing from clean to dirty and not vice-versa.

> AIRBORNE CONTAMINATION

In high-risk areas like surgical rooms or ICUs, ensure that there is positive pressure (air flows in but not out) to keep contaminants from entering. In isolation rooms, negative pressure (foul air is extracted) to assist prevent the spread of airborne infection. Remember 70% of the top 20 pathogens in veterinary practice have the ability to be passed airborne. You cannot sanitise an airborne infection without airspace sanitisation, i.e. airborne disinfection by fogging, using a disinfectant with safety and efficacy certification for use in this way.



Assess Risk of Cross-Contamination

> ANIMAL HANDLING

Review how animals are handled throughout their visit. Are there protocols in place to limit direct contact between healthy animals and those with infectious conditions? Are animals with contagious diseases isolated immediately upon arrival?

> USE OF COMMON AREAS

In areas such as waiting rooms, kennels, and grooming spaces, assess whether there is a risk of cross-contamination between animals. Are these areas cleaned and disinfected regularly? Are animals with contagious conditions segregated from others in these spaces?

> SHARED EQUIPMENT

If animals share equipment (e.g. exam tables, leashes, toys), assess how these items are cleaned and disinfected between uses. Shared items can be a significant source of cross-contamination.

> EVALUATE, TRAIN AND ASSESS THE RISKS OF EXOGENOUS CONTAMINATION

i.e. infection risks from outside of the patient, i.e. spread of infection on staff uniforms, equipment, patient food / water, fomites around the building etc. Such risks commonly arise due to lack of monitoring, poor training and poor working practices.



Monitor and Evaluate Staff Training and Compliance

> TRAINING IN HYGIENE PRACTICES

Evaluate whether all staff, including veterinarians, technicians and support staff, receive regular training on hygiene protocols, infection control procedures and PPE usage. Are staff up to date with the required hygiene and infection control training and is there a documented record available?

> STAFF COMPLIANCE

Assess how well staff adhere to hygiene protocols. Are staff members following hand hygiene and PPE guidelines? Is there regular oversight or auditing to ensure compliance with cleaning and sterilisation procedures?

> STAFF AWARENESS

Regularly test staff knowledge of infection control procedures. This could be done through quizzes or practical observations to ensure staff are competent in handling hygiene and infection control procedures.

> PEER-ON-PEER, MONTHLY HAND WASH AUDITS

Are advised in all veterinary facilities.





Examine Animal and Facility-Specific Risk Factors

> ANIMAL POPULATION RISK

Consider the type of animals being treated in the facility. Are there specific animal populations at higher risk for infection (e.g. immune-compromised animals, young puppies or kittens, elderly animals, or those with pre-existing conditions)? Does the facility have protocols in place to address the increased hygiene needs of these animals?

> SURGICAL AND CRITICAL CARE AREAS

Evaluate the cleanliness and infection control measures in areas where surgery or critical care is provided. Are sterilisation protocols followed meticulously? Are high-risk procedures and post-operative care areas carefully monitored for signs of infection?



Assess Environmental Control Measures

> CLEANING MATERIALS AND DISINFECTANTS

Review the types of cleaning agents and disinfectants used in the facility. Are they effective against the pathogens common in veterinary settings? Do staff use them according to the manufacturer's instructions, including dilution rates and contact time?

> PPE, UNIFORM, LINEN AND LAUNDRY HANDLING

Evaluate how soiled linens, bedding and towels are handled. Are they washed and disinfected appropriately? Is the laundry area kept clean and free of contamination?



Check Record-Keeping and Incident Documentation

> INFECTION TRACKING

It is vital that 'positive nosocomial infection surveillance' is applied in any veterinary facility. Review the records of infections or hygiene-related incidents in the facility. Are there logs for tracking infections, particularly nosocomial infections, and are these being regularly reviewed? Are there protocols for reporting infections and how are these infections addressed?

> AUDITS AND INSPECTIONS

Review the documentation of routine hygiene audits, which must include regular, unannounced multi-site (typically 100 swabs for a referral hospital, 50 for small animal hospital, 25 for a standalone facility with a low case load of minor surgical patients, 15 for a non-surgical branch surgery – as a starting point, once average swab results for the whole facility are no more than 50% above the recommended threshold, then swab numbers can be reduced by half, but the frequency of testing should be maintained as 'monthly') quantitative surface testing, e.g. application of ATP testing and inspections. Regular unannounced ATP testing will detect any reservoirs of contamination or infection, as well as poor working practices.





Assess Client and Public Interaction

> CLIENT EDUCATION

Evaluate how the practice educates clients on hygiene practices. Are clients instructed on how to keep their animals clean and healthy? Are there signs and guidelines to promote hygiene, such as instructions for handling pets in the waiting room or proper disposal of waste? Is the importance of 'positive surveillance for nosocomial infection' shared with clients and their assistance sought?

> CLIENT ACCESS TO HYGIENE STATIONS

Are hand sanitisers and hygiene stations available for clients in the waiting areas? Is there enough signage to remind clients to practice proper hygiene when entering or exiting the facility?

A hygiene risk assessment involves a detailed review of the veterinary facility's layout, cleaning protocols, infection control measures, staff practices and environmental factors. Identifying potential hygiene risks and addressing them proactively can help prevent the spread of infections, safeguard animal and staff health, and improve overall facility safety and quality of care. Regular assessments, ongoing staff education, and consistent monitoring are essential to maintaining high hygiene standards in any veterinary practice.

