



Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

October 2013

Infection Control

Background

Under section 39 of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act* (National Law) as in force in each State and Territory, the Board has developed *Guidelines on Infection Control* (the Board's Guidelines).

The Board's Guidelines are based on the adoption of the National Health and Medical Research Council (2010) *Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare*, Commonwealth of Australia (the NHMRC Guidelines). The NHMRC Guidelines are found at:

www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/cd33_complete.pdf

NHMRC Guidelines

The NHMRC Guidelines are extensive and cover all health care situations, many of which are not applicable to osteopathic practice. However, as health practitioners, it is important for osteopaths to be familiar with the guidelines for all health care settings and to use professional discretion as to which apply to their clinical setting and caseload.

To assist osteopaths to adhere to the Board's Guidelines, the following is a brief outline of the most relevant sections of the NHMRC Guidelines:

- Part A presents background information that is recommended reading for everyone working in health care (for example as continuing professional development). It includes important basics of infection prevention and control, such as the main modes of transmission of infectious agents and the application of risk-management principles. This part of the guidelines is a useful overview to infection control and the context for further reading.
- In Part B, the main areas which are of concern to osteopaths working in office-based private practice are in Section B1, which describe standard precautions used at all times to minimise the risk of transmission of infectious agents. In applying standard and transmission-based infection prevention and control strategies as part of day-to-day practice, osteopaths should ensure that their patients understand why certain practices are being undertaken, and that these practices are in place to protect everyone from infection. Osteopaths should also be aware of their role in minimising risks by following basic hand hygiene and use of alcohol-based hand rubs; hand care; respiratory hygiene; cough etiquette; the safe use and disposal of sharps; and environmental cleaning.

To assist osteopaths to adhere to the Board's Guidelines, the Board has summarised the sections of the NHMRC Guidelines which it considers to be of most relevance and importance to osteopaths in a supplementary paper titled: *Infection Control: Summary of NHMRC Guidelines for Osteopaths* (the Supplementary Paper).

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency

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Both the Board's Guidelines and the Supplementary Paper are published at:
www.osteopathyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines.aspx

This FAQ sheet is a brief overview of questions that have been raised with the Board while developing the Guidelines. The following FAQs should be used in conjunction with the Supplementary Paper in identifying those sections of the NHMRC Guidelines that are most relevant for office-based private practice.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Will all clinics be required to vacuum carpets with a HEPA filter on a daily basis?

No. While considered ideal, it is not essential in osteopathic office-based practice.

Are hard floor surfaces required in all treatment rooms?

Floor coverings have not been generally related to healthcare associated infection. Hard surfaces are easier to clean, however carpeting may offer advantages unrelated to infection prevention and control, including noise reduction. The NHMRC Guidelines suggest that textile floor finishes should not be considered unless there is a comprehensive maintenance and replacement program in place complying with AS/NZS 3733. The Osteopathy Board of Australia considers that adherence to this standard is not essential for office-based osteopathic practice but regular thorough cleaning, maintenance and replacement is expected.

Will all clinics need to keep a variety of systems, records and test results to show they meet hygiene standards for health care settings?

No. Regular cleaning and adherence to hygiene standards is expected in all osteopathic practices but formal record keeping is not essential for office-based osteopathic practices.

Should sharps bins be located in every treatment room or is a single, portable sharps bin sufficient?

A sharps bin must be located in every treatment room. A portable sharps bin will be considered sufficient, provided appropriate measures are taken to ensure the bin is in the treatment room and is as close as possible to the point of use, out of reach of children and secure to prevent tipping.

Does every treatment room require a basin for washing hands?

No. The Osteopathy Board of Australia considers that it is a minimum standard to use soap and water between patients, with the recommendation that using alcohol-based hand rubs is more effective against the majority of common infectious agents on hands than hand hygiene with plain or antiseptic soap and water. In circumstances when there is an increased risk of infection transmission, alcohol-based hand rubs should be employed, or if a basin is not available in the treatment room.

Do treatment rooms require alcohol-based hand rubs to comply with hygiene requirements or will soap and warm water be sufficient?

As good practice, alcohol-based hand rubs should be available to all healthcare workers as required. They do not need to be in each treatment room if a basin is available, but easily accessible to all.

Are domestic laundry machines and powders adequate for washing of towels, gowns, or treatment bench covers or do such items need to be laundered under AS/NZS 4146?

Domestic laundry machines and powders are considered adequate for washing these items in normal circumstances. In situations when an increased risk of infection transmission is present, items should be laundered according to AS/NZS 4146. Used linen may be washed in domestic washing machine in separate loads to other domestic washing. If hot water is not available, only individual patient loads should be washed at one time. It is recommended that clothes dryers should be used for drying.

Are all osteopaths engaged in clinical practice required to follow the immunisation recommendations for the prevention and control of communicable diseases?

No. While it is recommended that all practitioners follow the immunisation recommendations, the Osteopathy Board of Australia recognises the right of individuals to choose not to be immunised. However, if such a choice is made, it must be undertaken with a clear understanding of the risks, both to the practitioner and to patients. These risks must be actively managed while remembering that the health and wellbeing of the patient is the practitioner's primary concern. Familiarisation with exclusion periods for each communicable disease is essential.

Should more specific infection control guidelines be published for circumstances in which osteopaths include skin penetrating techniques in their practice?

The NHMRC Guidelines are clear and concise and include principles rather than specific direction.

Each state and territory has legislation that regulates skin penetration procedures. Osteopaths who use techniques involving skin penetration must read and comply with these requirements. The legislation for each state and territory cannot be summarised here but familiarisation with appropriate legislation is essential.

Some state and territory regulations and legislation contain specific directions for the office-based practice environment where skin penetration procedures are utilised. These include:

- wash basins with warm water located in each room,
- single use towels or other hand drying equipment next to the sink,
- fresh garments or towels to be used on each patient,
- linen on beds must be covered with single use paper or protective towel,
- all linen must be cleaned with hot water and laundry detergent, and
- all linen should be stored where it will not be contaminated.

Some legislation also specifies, amongst other things, the use of gloves, masks, face protection, swabs and equipment sterilisation.

A comprehensive resource for osteopaths who practice skin penetration techniques is the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia's [*Infection prevention and control guidelines for acupuncture practice*](#).