Universal Precautions

**What are Universal Precautions?** These are the basic clinical practices that we use with all clients in order to take reasonable precautions against disease transmission. **Universal** means we take the same precautions with *all* clients, regardless of how they look or what we *think* we know about their disease status.

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**Consistent application of the following Universal Precautions will eliminate most transmission problems:**

1. **Wash your hands before and after each client contact!** Hand-washing is the #1 way to avoid disease transmission! Wash with soap and water or use an alcohol-based antimicrobial cleanser.

2. **People who are coughing should cover their mouths or wear masks.** Masks for practitioners or clients are available in the supply cabinet.

3. **Wear gloves if you are going to come into contact with a client’s open sores, blood or body fluids, or if you yourself have an open cut or sore that can come into contact with a client’s skin.** Massage therapists should not massage over open sores or rashes, ever. Acupuncturists may, at their own discretion, choose to wear gloves when needling or not — but you should be consistent either way: either wear gloves for all of your clients or none. Gloves are available in the treatment rooms.

4. **Don’t touch your face, eyes, or nose after touching a client — and vice-versa.** Avoid contact between your mucous membranes and any source of potential contamination.

5. **Change sheets/pillow cases between clients.**

6. **Don’t massage directly over or into open sores or rashes.** Actually, this has little to do with disease transmission (as long as you wear gloves.) But it can irritate or even exacerbate the condition, and possibly cause pain or discomfort to the client.

7. **Have a question?** Ask the Shift Coordinator, write a referral, or contact the Clinical Care Manager.
## A Quick Guide to Universal Precautions and Special Considerations for Particular Diseases

### Use UP? What Else? / Special Notes

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<th><strong>Blood-Borne Pathogens</strong></th>
<th>HBV, HCV, HIV</th>
<th>Not transmittable by casual contact!</th>
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| **Airborne Pathogens**    | Common Cold, Flu, Cough, Pneumonia, Mycobacteria, Tuberculosis | Practitioners: stay home in early stages of cold/flu
Clients: come in & get treated
Wear a mask, cover your mouth for any coughing. |
| Measles, Chicken Pox, SARS, H1N1, Bird Flu | Practitioners & clients: stay home, see your MD.
Stay home for the duration of the illness. |
| **Transmitted by Touch or Shared Linens** | MRSA, Rashes, Open Sores | Practitioners: stay home; Clients: come in
Never massage into or over any open sores or rashes.
Use gloves if you will come into contact with an open sore or rash, or if you yourself have an open cut or sore. |
| Scabies, Bed Bugs, Lice | Practitioners: stay home; Clients: come in
Practitioners should wear gloves to work with client; shift coordinators should bag linens carefully in plastic and set aside immediately for laundry service; clients should go straight into treatment room, not hang out in lobby |
| Shingles | Practitioners: **if you never had chicken pox**, do not see clients with shingles. Otherwise Universal Precautions apply. |
What’s the Clinic Policy on…..?

... Blood-Borne Pathogens?

Blood-borne pathogens include HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. At CMCC, you can avoid transmitting HIV, HBV, and HCV simply through the use of Standard, Universal Precautions. These diseases are not easily passed except by blood (or in some cases, by some body fluids such as semen or saliva.) There is not one documented case of transmission of HIV or Hepatitis C by acupuncture needle or by casual contact. Hepatitis B is more virulent than either HIV or Hepatitis C, but again is difficult to transmit except by blood exposure, such as through a hollow-bore needle or during childbirth, or much less often by sharing toothbrushes or otherwise coming into contact with a person’s saliva or blood. Transmission by acupuncture needle would be very rare. Transmission by casual contact is not going to happen. Hospitals advise healthcare workers to obtain HAV and HBV vaccination because it is easily obtained and very effective, and because they may have a higher risk of exposure to blood than a layperson—however, as discussed, such exposure to blood is extremely unlikely here at the clinic. If you are interested in finding out more about resources on low-cost Hepatitis B vaccination and screening, see [http://www.sfhepbfree.org/](http://www.sfhepbfree.org/).

... Air-Borne Pathogens?

The disease that is probably most easily transmitted among practitioners and clients at CMCC is... the common cold. For practitioners, if you find yourself coming down with the early stages of a cold or flu, or if you’re experiencing chills or fever, just stay home. (Contact Client Services at ext. 4 if this is last-minute before your shift, or contact Volunteer Services at ext. 21 if you know before Thursday that you won’t make your shift that weekend.) We encourage clients who are feeling sick to come in if they are scheduled for acupuncture or herbs, because we may be able to help resolve the cold more quickly. Bodywork may be contraindicated in the early stages of a cold.

People with a cough are encouraged to cover their mouth when coughing, or use a mask. Masks are available in the supply cabinet. All clinics are now emphasizing “proper cough etiquette” because of the resurgence of tuberculosis and concerns about bird flu, SARS, etc.

Clients or practitioners diagnosed with tuberculosis, measles, chicken pox (not shingles), or other virulent airborne diseases would be asked not to come into the clinic, to avoid transmitting to others, particularly those with compromised immune systems.

... Pathogens that can be transmitted by touch or by shared linens?

One disease that some people worry about transmitting is Shingles. While shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox, however, it is not airborne. Simply practice universal precautions to avoid transmission. However, if you are one of the rare adults who has never had chicken pox, you should request that you not treat a client who has shingles — not because you might get shingles, but because you might get chicken pox. For client comfort, please do not massage directly over an area with open sores, ever — shingles or otherwise. Acupuncture, of course, may actually help relieve the pain and resolve the condition more quickly. For more information, see the NIH website [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/shingles/detail_shingles.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/shingles/detail_shingles.htm)

MRSA (antibiotic-resistant staph infection) can also be spread by contact. If you know a client has MRSA, or if you have a client with any unexplained rash or sores, practice Universal Precautions — wash hands, change linens, avoid touching your face, eyes, or any mucous membranes after touching the client — as you would for any client. Avoid massage directly over or into a rash or open sore.

Bed bugs and lice, while not pathogens per se, are annoying and can be transmitted by sharing linens or by close proximity. It is of utmost importance to us that we preserve our clients’ dignity and access to care while we prevent the transmission of these annoying, but basically harmless, pests. Clients with bed bugs or lice are welcome to come into the clinic for treatment. Shift coordinators should invite clients with bed bugs or lice to go straight into their treatment room without waiting in the lobby. Practitioners should invite clients to bag their belongings for the duration of their treatment. After the treatment, practitioners should put the bed linens in a tied plastic bag and put to the side for special laundry service. Ask the Shift Coordinator where to put them.