

Recommended procedure

BSA EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Recommended Minimum Procedure for the Cleaning of Specula, etc., and Associated Infection Control

Many hospitals, clinics and health centres have their own stringent procedures for disinfection. The following is a recommended minimum standard, not intended to replace existing more stringent standards.

Procedure for cleaning and disinfection of otoscope specula, earlight probes, probe tips and all other tools used in contact with the outer ear:

1. Wash thoroughly in fresh hot water and detergent to remove any visible contamination.
2. Soak in appropriate sterilizing solution, diluted according to the manufacturer's instructions, for 20 minutes. The active chemicals in these solutions include chlorhexidine gluconate, cetrimide, dichlorometaxlylenol and sodium hypochlorite.
Note that some solutions are not suitable for metal items.
3. Rinse in fresh water.
4. Store dry in a clean container.
5. Hands should be washed thoroughly before handling clean items.

Notes:

- Plastic items will deteriorate if soaked for too long.
- The common habit of leaving items soaking indefinitely in solution (often not fresh) is discouraged as stale solution is ineffective and will collect debris. Any solution is a potential growing medium for bacteria, so items must be stored dry.
- Used items should be stored in a sealed container, away from clean items. With the common use of plastic or specula and impedance

tips, professionals should have enough items to avoid the need for cleaning between individual patients, and the cleaning can be done at the end of each day or clinic.

- Sometimes the immediate cleaning of items between patients will be unavoidable. The routine cleaning of earlight probes can usually be achieved by wiping with a suitable swab, saturated with isopropyl alcohol, unless used on patients with infections. It is also good practice to wipe clean specula with such a swab before use, but this does not replace the need for proper cleaning and infection control.
- In most cases it is acceptable to use the same item on both ears of one patient, unless there is a risk of cross infection. Even if no infection is apparent an item must not be used on more than one patient without being cleaned.

Special attention must be paid to items used on patients with discharge or blood in the ear. Health centres and hospitals may have the facilities to clean these items properly (e.g. using one of the chlorine based compounds to sterilize them, as boiling is inadequate). However, it is recommended that, when used away from centres with these facilities, such contaminated items, etc., are stored in a sealed container and disposed of safely. It is expected that hearing aid dispensers, etc., will be able to arrange for safe disposal of contaminated items via a local health centre or hospital. It is strongly recommended that rubber gloves are worn when working on bleeding or discharging ears, and that contaminated gloves are also disposed of safely.