



CCAOM Position Paper on Glove Use during the Practice of Acupuncture

(Approved by CCAOM on May 8, 2014)

The administration of acupuncture should ensure the attainment of maximum benefit, with the least possible harm. The transmission of bloodborne pathogens or other microbial pathogens to practitioners and patients in acupuncture practices due to unsafe practices is unacceptable.

Acupuncture practitioners and office personnel are at risk for exposure to bloodborne pathogens, including hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Although this risk has lessened due to CNT procedures in the last 10 years,(1) exposures to such pathogens can occur through needlesticks or cuts from other sharp instruments contaminated with an infected patient's blood, or through contact of the eye, nose, mouth, or skin with a patient's blood. The vast majority of blood to blood contacts resulting from healthcare procedures do not result in infection. (2) Of the bloodborne pathogens, HBV is the most likely to be passed by needlestick exposure.(2) HBV infection is usually preventable through a vaccine series. The only sure method of preventing HIV and HCV is abstinence from activities that involve the exchange of potentially infected body fluids. In the health care workplace, accidental contact with potentially contaminated blood or body fluids may be unavoidable. However, strict observance of standard precautions can prevent infection from exposure, including bloodborne pathogens such as HBV, HCV, and HIV. (3)

Personal protective equipment (PPE) as defined by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is "specialized clothing or equipment, worn by an employee for protection against infectious materials."(4) Gloves are the most common type of PPE used in healthcare settings.(4) Most patient care activities that involve mucus membranes, blood or OPIM require the use of a single pair of nonsterile gloves made of either nitrile or vinyl. (5) Gloves protect the healthcare worker against contact with infectious materials. Gloves do not prevent needlestick injuries. (6, 7)

Once contaminated, gloves can become a means for spreading infectious materials. Gloves must be changed between patient visits and handwashing must be performed immediately after removing gloves. (8)

Gloves need to be used by acupuncturists when blood or OPIM is expected to be present during a healthcare procedure. (8, 9, 10) There are no studies of glove use in the acupuncture setting. However, acupuncture needle insertion is similar to injection practices so guidelines for injections and vaccine administration can be used to formulate guidelines for the practice of acupuncture.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations do not require gloves to be worn when administering vaccines unless the person administering the vaccine is likely to come into contact with potentially infectious body fluids or has open lesions on the hands. (4, 11) According to the World Health Organization (WHO), routine intradermal, subcutaneous, and intramuscular injection administration does not require the use of gloves if the health worker's skin is intact. (12) The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) similarly recommends glove use only when anticipating direct contact with blood or body fluids, mucous membranes, nonintact skin and other potentially infectious material.(13) It does not recommend the use of gloves routinely for injections. (7)

Acupuncture needle insertion is similar to a subcutaneous or intramuscular vaccine or medication needle insertion. Since bleeding occurs only rarely during needle insertion, gloves are not needed for acupuncture needle insertion.

This interpretation was echoed in a letter from OSHA to an inquiry of May 11, 2005, from the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs regarding the use of gloves for acupuncture: *“According to the WHO, the needle penetration used for acupuncture is described to be similar to a subcutaneous or intramuscular injection. In general, OSHA does not consider it necessary to use gloves when giving subcutaneous or intramuscular injections as long as bleeding that could result in hand contact with blood or OPIM is not anticipated. The same would be true with acupuncture procedures as long as contact with blood is not anticipated.”*(14)

Gloves Required during Needle Insertion:

A very few needling point locations do require glove use due to their location on or near mucous membranes. These include Ren 1 (huiyin), 2, Du 1 (changqian), jinjin and yuye (M-HN-20). Gloves must be worn if the health worker's skin is NOT intact (e.g. through eczema, or cracked or dry skin, or an open lesion on the hands). (12) Gloves must be worn if the skin of the patient being needled is similarly not intact.

Glove Use for Needle Removal:

The risk of bleeding during most acupuncture needle removal is less than 4%. (15) There is generally no need for gloves during needle removal. Surveillance of immunization adverse events similarly does not report bleeding as being observed regularly. (16)

However, OSHA states that *“If an employee is required to clean and dress the acupuncture sites following the extraction of the needles and any bleeding is anticipated, then gloves must be worn when doing so.”* (14) This reinforces the need to wear gloves when the patient's skin in the area where acupuncture is being applied is not intact.

Glove Use for Other Procedures:

The practices acupuncturists utilize that do require glove use include bleeding techniques and wet cupping techniques. Since expelling blood is part of the therapeutic process for these practices, gloves must be worn.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The evidence suggests that both the practitioner's hands and the patient's skin at the acupuncture point need to be clean prior to administration of a needle.
- Glove use is not needed for routine needle insertion or removal.
- Glove use is required for acupuncture when needling areas of non-intact skin, or mucus membranes.
- Glove use is required when performing procedures that involve the expression of blood, such as bleeding techniques and wet cupping.
- Proper hand hygiene includes handwashing upon removal of gloves.

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