

BIHS has been asked about guidance on two matters – whether it is safe for Ambulatory BP monitoring (ABPM) services to restart, and how to reduce the risk of COVID transmission from ABPM and other BP measuring equipment. It is not possible to give definitive advice, but the following comments may be helpful, based feedback from a selection of BIHS members and resources from manufacturers and suppliers.

Fitting of ABPM equipment

Most members reported initial cessation of ABPM services since the start of the COVID outbreak, when attendance at healthcare facility was considered an unnecessary risk. Most centres are now looking to re-start, as the risk of delayed BP diagnosis or continued poor control starts to mount. Many have moved to frequent home BP measurement with data sharing between patient and care provider. Where patients attend a healthcare facility, standard precautions should be used (hand cleaning, single attendee, face covering, temperature check etc.). A few centres have moved to the ABPM equipment being fitted at the patient's home by a technician, with equipment being returned by post/courier, to reduce face-face contact to an absolute minimum, but this is expensive.

Cleaning of BP equipment

The Spacelabs website has been updated since COVID¹ and advises:

“Cleaning Instructions: For normal cleaning with mild detergents or a diluted bleach solution (1-2%), wipe the cuff with the solution, rinse with water, and dry. Disinfecting Instructions: Using a disinfecting solution such as Enzol, Cidezyme, Cidex, Sporicidin, Isopropyl Alcohol (70%), or Ethanol (70%), wipe or spray the cuff and allow to stand for approximately one minute. Rinse well with water and dry. Note: If the cuff is submerged in the disinfecting solution, the fittings should be capped to prevent liquid from getting inside the cuff.”

Older woven material cuffs may need to be removed and washed or replaced by wipeable non-woven material. Where a woven cloth pouch and strap have been provided, simple washing in detergent, and thorough drying should suffice. The hard surfaces of the equipment can be cleaned with standard surface disinfectant meeting standard EN144476.

Single Use equipment

Other centres have explored the use of disposable sleeves which provide a physical barrier between the patients and the BP measuring equipment. Disposable sleeves are available from various outlets^{2 3 4}.

Conclusion

The risks of transmission of COVID from adequately cleaned equipment is likely to be very small. The risk of transmission of COVID from visiting a healthcare facility can be minimised with the use of standard screening questions and personal protective procedures. This must be weighed against the known value of establishing a diagnosis and achieving effective control of high blood pressure. Most BP centres contacted by BIHS are now re-starting ABPM services with the precautions described.

¹ <https://www.spacelabshealthcare.com/support/cleaning-instructions/>

² <https://www.hillcroftsupplies.com/shop/equipment/cuffs-accessories/301/blood-pressure-cuff-barriers-pack-50/3548>

³ <https://www.pmsinstruments.co.uk/blog/cleaning-blood-pressure-equipment-and-cuffs-during-covid-19/>

⁴ <https://www.numed.co.uk/products?search=disposable+cuffs>