

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SELECTED PROCEDURES OF
INFECTION CONTROL RECOMMENDED TO TRADITIONAL
ACUPUNCTURISTS BY THE BRITISH ACUPUNCTURE
COUNCIL.**

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ABSTRACT

The incidence of acupuncture associated bacterial infection is extremely low, but cases of severe infections have been reported. With increases in antibiotic resistance among bacteria, it is critical that good infection control procedures are in place within the acupuncture clinic to minimise the risk of infection. This study aimed to evaluate aspects of infection control to address the question: "How effective are the current recommended infection control procedures in protecting against bacterial infection following acupuncture treatment?" Three investigations were performed. The first evaluated the bacterial load and organism type at different anatomical locations in 19 individuals, grouped according to age and gender, to determine the risk of infection. The efficiency of bacterial reduction by swabbing with 70% isopropyl alcohol was then determined. No differences in skin flora could be identified with regard to age and gender but all individuals carried organisms that could produce infection. Isopropyl alcohol reduced the bacterial load to undetectable levels, so its use in the acupuncture setting is recommended. The second investigation evaluated the effectiveness of liquid soap and alcohol gel to reduce bacterial load. Results indicated that liquid soap is ineffective at reducing resident flora but efficient at removing transient species. Alcohol gel was efficient at removing both resident and transient species. The use of liquid soap should therefore be restricted to removing dirt from the hands and alcohol gel used to 'degerm'. The final investigation evaluated microbial transfer to acupuncture needles. Data suggests that microbial transfer to needle shafts is minimal and unaffected by hand washing. However the use of sterile cotton wool can block microbial transfer so its use during needle insertion is recommended.