

Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin



Information for Health Care Workers

This Bulletin highlights precautions to be taken by health care workers who may be exposed to blood and body fluids. In general, workers should minimize direct contact with blood or other body fluids, and take precautions against penetrating injuries from needles and other sharps. Taking such precautions will not only protect against HIV (the AIDS virus), but also against more infectious agents such as hepatitis B and some other hospital-acquired infections.

Health care workers include (but are not limited to) nurses, physicians, nursing assistants, radiology technicians, physiotherapists, respiratory technicians, porters, ward aids, housekeepers, laundry workers, central supply and sterilization workers, incinerator attendants, autopsy assistants, paramedics and acupuncturists. (Dental and laboratory workers are considered in separate bulletins.)

Tests for HIV infection are not 100 percent accurate. Testing all patients for HIV is not practical and does not provide protection. Rather than try to identify infected persons, workers are advised to use "universal precautions". This means that blood and certain body fluids should be handled as if they are infectious. All patients should be handled in a way that minimizes exposure to blood and these body fluids. Universal precautions apply to blood, other body fluids containing visible blood, semen and vaginal secretions. They also apply to tissues and cerebrospinal, synovial, pleural, peritoneal, pericardial and amniotic fluids. They do not apply to nasal secretions, sputum, saliva, sweat, tears, vomitus, urine and feces unless they contain visible blood.

For more information:

 www.hre.gov.ab.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bh002.pdf
Precautions for Workers Exposed to HIV

Summary of universal precautions

- Handle blood and other body fluids as if infectious.
- Handle all patients in a way that minimizes exposure to blood and other body fluids.
- Avoid needle-sticks and cuts from sharps. Place in puncture resistant containers. Needles are not to be recapped, cut, bent, broken, or removed from disposable syringes.
- Wash hands/skin surface immediately after any contact with blood or other body fluids.
- Wear disposable waterproof gloves when in contact with blood or other body fluids.
- Wear gowns, masks and eye protection during procedures likely to involve extensive splashing or generation of droplets of blood or other body fluids.
- Use mouthpieces, pocket masks or resuscitation bags when doing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, if available.
- Clean up spills and surfaces or items contaminated with blood or body fluids using detergent and water. Disinfect with a solution of one part household bleach to nine parts water or an appropriate chemical germicide.
- Place items or waste soiled with blood or other body fluids in impervious bags and label before sending for reprocessing or disposal.
- Health care workers should routinely follow universal precautions when contact with blood or other body fluids of any patient is anticipated. The following are examples of situations which are specific to health care settings.

Phlebotomies

Gloves should always be available to workers who wish to use them for phlebotomy.

Gloves should be used when:

- The worker has cuts, scratches or other breaks in the skin on hands.
- Contamination of hands with blood may occur, e.g. when performing a phlebotomy on an uncooperative patient.
- Performing finger and/or heel sticks on infants and children.
- Persons are receiving training in phlebotomy.

Invasive procedure

Invasive procedures involve surgical entry into tissues, cavities or organs, or repair of major traumatic injuries. They also include cardiac catheterizations, angiographic procedures, bronchoscopy, endoscopy, dental procedures and vaginal or caesarean deliveries. The following precautions should be followed during invasive procedures.

- Gloves and masks should be worn at all times.
- Protective eyewear or face shields should be worn during procedures generating bone chips and splashes or droplets of blood or other body fluids.
- Gowns or aprons should be worn during procedures likely to generate splashes of blood or other body fluids.
- Gloves and gowns should be worn during vaginal or caesarean deliveries, when handling the placenta or infant until blood and amniotic fluid are removed from the infant's skin, and during post-partum care of the umbilical cord.

Specimens

- All specimens should be handled as if they could be infectious.
- All specimens of blood or other body fluids should be placed in a well constructed container with a secure lid to prevent leakage during transport.
- Care should be taken when collecting the specimen to avoid contaminating the outside of the container and the laboratory form accompanying it.
 - If the outside of the container becomes contaminated, it should be cleaned and decontaminated with a solution of one part household bleach to nine parts water.
 - When transporting specimens to another facility, packaging should be in three layers.

- The specimen container should be placed in a second watertight container, with absorbent material between the two.
- These should then be placed in an outer package to protect them from physical damage.

Postmortem procedures

All persons performing or assisting in postmortem procedures should wear gloves, masks, protective eyewear, gowns and waterproof aprons.

Instruments and surfaces contaminated during postmortem procedures should be decontaminated with an appropriate chemical germicide.

Pregnant health care workers

Pregnant health care workers are not known to be at greater risk of contacting HIV infection than other workers. They should follow the same precautions as other health care workers.


For more information


 Sexually Transmitted Disease Control (780) 427-2830

 Toll Free AIDS information 1-800-772-AIDS


 www.hre.gov.ab.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bh002.pdf
Precautions for Workers Exposed to HIV

 www.hre.gov.ab.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bh003.pdf
AIDS Information for Health Care Workers







 www.hre.gov.ab.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bh004.pdf
AIDS Information for Laboratory Workers

 www.hre.gov.ab.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bh006.pdf
AIDS Information for Funeral Service Workers

 www.hre.gov.ab.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bh008.pdf
AIDS Information for School Workers

 www.hre.gov.ab.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bh009.pdf
AIDS Information for Correctional Workers


References

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