

INFECTION CONTROL

IN HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

INFORMATION SHEET

What is Infection Control?

Infection Control in a health care facility is the prevention of the spread of microorganisms from:

- Patient to patient
- Patient to Staff member
- Staff member to patient

Who does Infection Control?

Every health care facility should have a nominated person or team to ensure Infection Control Policies and Procedures are in place.

However, all employees who have contact with patients or items used in the care of patients must adhere to Infection Control Policies and Procedures, which means **YOU** do Infection Control.

Why is Infection Control important in health care facilities?

In most health care facilities many sick people are treated or cared for in confined spaces. This means there are many microorganisms present. Patients will come into contact with many members of staff who can potentially spread the microorganisms and infections between patients.

Large amounts of waste contaminated with blood and body substances are handled and processed in health care settings increasing the risk of infection.

The following medical procedures also increase the risk of infection:

- Inserting a tube into the body to drain or deliver fluids provides a pathway through which bacteria can enter
- Surgery requires cutting the skin which is one of the body's most important defenses against infection
- The over-use of antibiotics have caused the development of some drug resistant bacteria that are harder to destroy

Controlling the spread of infections in a health care facility is, therefore, very important.

What is the risk of people working in health care facilities getting infections from patients?

The risk is very low if all staff members follow good hygiene principles and other Standard Precautions.

What are Standard Precautions?

Standard Precautions (or Universal Precautions) are work practices that are required for the basic level of Infection Control. They include:

- Good hygiene practices
- Frequent hand washing
- The appropriate use of gloves
- The use of other personal protective equipment, such as eye protection, masks, aprons, gowns and overalls
- The safe use and disposal of sharp instruments, such as needle and syringes
- The use of disposable equipment where applicable and available
- Correct cleaning, disinfection and sterilization of non-disposable equipment
- Safe collection, storage and disposal of waste
- The appropriate use of cleaning agents
- Protocols for preventing and managing occupational exposures to blood or body substances

Why do we need Standard Precautions?

Standard Precautions will help stop the spread of infections. Often you can't tell who is infected with a disease, or the person may be infected but have not yet developed any signs or symptoms. Some diseases can take several months before people become sick but they can still be infectious.

Therefore **ALL** body substances (except sweat and tears) of **ALL** people are considered to be potential sources of infection.

When should we use Standard Precautions?

For the treatment and care of ALL patients regardless of their infectious status.

Why is frequent hand washing important?

Hand washing is the most important procedure in the prevention and minimisation of the spread of infection within health care settings.

Always wash your hands thoroughly using soap and running water:

- At the start and finish of your work shift
- Before and after physical contact with a patient
- After handling contaminated items, such as bedpans, urine bottles and dressings
- After removing gloves
- Before and after eating, drinking and smoking
- Before and after toileting
- After blowing your nose or covering a sneeze
- Whenever hands become obviously soiled

When should I wear gloves?

Gloves are worn as a barrier to protect the wearer's hands from contamination or to prevent the transfer of organisms already on the hands.

Gloves ideally must be worn in situations where the worker can be potentially exposed to blood or body substances:

- When handling blood and body substances
- When handling non-intact skin
- When handling mucous membranes
- While suctioning a patient
- While handling items or surfaces that have come into contact with blood or body substances
- While performing invasive procedures, such as venepuncture or a finger or heel stick
- When handling contaminated sharps

What other precautions should I take?

Cover cuts with a waterproof occlusive dressing. If you have any concerns about old cuts, sores, rashes or other lesions seek the advice of your supervisor, Staff Health Coordinator or Infection Control Officer.

Get yourself vaccinated against hepatitis B and tetanus. Vaccination is the most effective protection against these diseases. Always make sure your vaccinations are up-to-date.

What is the best way to remove a needle and syringe that has been disposed of incorrectly?

- Put on a pair of gloves
- Ideally take a sharps container to the needle and syringe
- **NEVER** recap a needle and syringe even if a cap is there
- Use tongs, or similar implement, to pick up the needle and syringe. If no implement is available, carefully pick up the needle and syringe with the needle furthest away from your fingers and body

- Place the sharps container on the floor or bench
- Carefully place the needle and syringe in the sharps container
- Report the incident to your supervisor

What should I do if I get a patient's blood or body substance on my skin?

If the blood or body substance is on intact skin, wash the blood or body substance off thoroughly with soap and water.

The skin acts as a very effective barrier and most infections cannot get through intact skin. All skin cuts, skin breaks, or other lesions should be covered with a water-resistant occlusive dressing at the start of your shift.

If you accidentally get blood or body substance in an open cut, non-intact skin, rash or other lesion:

- Immediately wash the wound with soap and water
- Cover all skin cuts or breaks with a water-resistant occlusive dressing

If you accidentally prick yourself with a used needle:

- Let the wound bleed freely for a few seconds
- Immediately wash the wound with soap and water
- Do not use any solution stronger than soap and water

If you accidentally get blood or body substance in the eye:

- Irrigate it gently and thoroughly with water
- **DO NOT USE SOAP**
- Gently pour water over the eye while pulling the eye lids up and down
- If you wear contact lenses, keep them in while you wash the eye.
- Then take the contact lenses out, clean them in the normal manner and put them back in again

If you accidentally get blood or body substance in the mouth:

- Spit the blood or body substance out
- Rinse the mouth several times with water, spitting out after each rinse

After any exposure:

Report the injury or exposure to your supervisor or manager. You will need to see the person designated in your facility's policy, such as the Infection Control Officer, who will determine the risk of infections and refer you for treatment if appropriate.

Most injuries are low risk for getting infections but they **MUST** be reported, documented and assessed by a medical professional.