

3.7 UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

OVERVIEW

“Universal precautions” are steps we should take to protect ourselves when we come into contact with the blood or body fluids of other people. Universal precautions are intended to stop the spread of germs to others.

Most of the time, you can't tell if a person is infected with AIDS, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or any number of other diseases. The best thing to do is treat the blood and body fluids of EVERY PERSON as POTENTIALLY infectious.

The blood-borne diseases most commonly transmitted are Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C and HIV. The viruses for these diseases can be transmitted through blood and through body fluids such as semen and vaginal secretions. Body fluids such as saliva, sweat, tears, urine, vomit or mucous, unless they are contaminated with blood, are not considered infectious. Viruses enter the body through breaks in the skin such as open sores or puncture wounds. They may also enter through the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose and eyes.

Universal Precautions recommended by Fraser Region Medical Health Officer must be used by all persons in our district who come into contact with blood and body fluids.

POLICY

The Association supports the use of Universal Precautions as a method to provide simple and basic precautions against the transmission of disease. To assure a universal of practice, the Association directs all persons to follow the Universal Precautions Procedures.

The Association will:

- > Maintain current Universal Precautions Procedures.
- > Provide an orientation with regard to Universal Precautions procedures to all contractors who are required to handle or may be exposed to blood and body fluids. Orientation will be provided based on the individual's needs by the Life Sharing Network Manager or Assistant Manager.
- > The contractor will be responsible for the cost of supplies necessary.

Contractors are expected to:

- > Attend and participate in orientation provided on universal precautions.
- > Follow the practices outlined in the Universal Precautions Procedures.

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Immunization

WCB Regulation Section 6.39 states that vaccination against Hepatitis B virus must be made available at no cost, upon request, for all workers who have or may have occupational exposure to hepatitis B virus.

UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS PROCEDURES¹

Blood and body fluids – ALWAYS treat as potentially infectious.

Clean up spills promptly using absorbent material first, then clean more thoroughly with a disinfectant like household bleach.

Gloves – wear latex, vinyl or rubber disposable gloves when handling blood, body fluids, or when cleaning cuts, scrapes, or wounds. Wash hands immediately after removing gloves, and dispose of the gloves in a plastic bag.

Sharp Objects – place needles and syringes in a safe container. **Never re-cap, bend or break off used needles!** Place them in a sealed puncture-proof metal or plastic container with a lid, such as an empty coffee tin and then place in the garbage.

Personal Articles – never share toothbrushes or razors. They can transmit small amounts of blood from one user to the next. Dispose of razors carefully. Wrap sanitary napkins before disposing. Handle bloody bedding or clothing cautiously, and wash in hot soapy water.

Handwashing is the best single way to prevent the spread of germs from one person to another. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 to 20 seconds.

Always Wash Hands:

- > before preparing food
- > before mealtimes
- > before breastfeeding, and
- > after toileting or diapering
- > before and after providing first aid
- > after handling blood or body fluids

How can you keep yourself safe?

Blood splashed on your skin may cause infection by getting into cuts, nicks, or raw chapped areas. Protect yourself by wearing gloves if you are exposed to

¹ Ministry of Health, Health File #29 Summer 2000 & Office of the Provincial Health Officer, June 1998

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blood or other body fluids. If this is not possible, then wash immediately after exposure.

Gloves are not necessarily required if you come into contact with urine, feces, nasal secretions, saliva, or vomit, **UNLESS** you can see blood in it. However, in some situations you may prefer to wear gloves. **Remember, it is always important to wash your hands carefully after touching any body fluids, even if you have worn gloves.**

How can you safely clean up spills of blood or other body fluids?

1. Protect yourself by wearing disposable vinyl or latex or rubber gloves. If there is a risk of splashing use protective eye wear.
2. Use disposable absorbent material such as paper towels to remove most of the spill. Place these in a plastic bag and deposit in the garbage.
3. Wipe the floor, or any contaminated surfaces with a disinfectant solution. This can be easily made by mixing one part household bleach to ten parts of water. This type of bleach solution should be freshly made up or it may lose its strength. For carpets or upholstery that may be damaged by bleach, other household germicides or disinfectant agents can be used. Soak mops or brushes that have been used for cleaning in a disinfectant for 20 minutes.
4. When you are finished, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

What should you do if you find a used syringe or condom?

A needle that someone else has used contains a small amount of their blood, which may carry the AIDS or hepatitis B virus. Used condoms can also contain infectious body fluids.

Teach children and other individuals we serve **NEVER** to touch needles, syringes, or used condoms that they find.

If you find a used syringe or condom – especially in a park, school or play ground – it is important to dispose of them promptly and carefully.

1. Use a pair of tongs or pliers, or a pair of sturdy gloves to pick up these items.
2. Discard condoms in a plastic bag.
3. Discard syringes or needles in a puncture-proof container, preferably one intended for such purposes. Any plastic or metal container with a lid, such as a coffee can, will also do.
4. When you have finished, wash your hands carefully with soap and water.

While the risk of infection from used condoms and syringes is very low, it is best to limit this risk as much as possible. It is important to help children and other individuals we serve to understand how important these precautions are.

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What should you do if you accidentally prick yourself with a dirty needle?

- > If possible, put the pricked area low to the ground to promote bleeding.
- > Wash the area well with soap and water.
- > Call the nearest local health unit or hospital Emergency Department immediately for treatment assessment.