

Biological hazards

– **Infectious disease control**

Accident and emergency departments >

This information bulletin provides examples of several safe work practices, which could form the basis of more detailed procedures to be adopted in individual work situations relating to accident and emergency situations in various health care environments.

Introduction

This information bulletin should be read in conjunction with the [National Code of Practice](#) for the Control of Work Related Exposure to Hepatitis and HIV (blood-borne) Viruses [NOHSC:2010(2003)], which is an Approved Code of Practice under section 187A of the [Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act](#).

Transmission of HIV and the Hepatitis B virus in the workplace has occurred in two major ways:

- When sharps contaminated with infected blood or body fluids penetrate the skin.
- When infected blood or body fluids splash into the eye or onto broken skin or into a cut.

Preventing transmission of HIV and the Hepatitis B virus in the workplace, therefore means preventing injuries from sharps and other instruments contaminated with blood or body fluids;

Contact between blood or body fluids and the eye, or other mucous membranes, and broken skin or cuts. Universal precautions are based on the concept that all blood, blood products and body fluids of all persons are potential sources of infection, independent of diagnosis or perceived risk. Therefore, all staff must adhere rigorously to protective measures, which minimise exposure to these agents. The use of universal precautions involves placing a barrier between staff and all blood and body fluids.

Training

It is essential that all accident and emergency department workers receive initial and ongoing training to enable them to do their duties in a healthy and safe manner. This training should enable them to anticipate and manage situations in which they may be exposed to infectious organisms such as HIV or the Hepatitis B virus.

It is also important that accident and emergency response staff have access to appropriate professional counselling and follow-up services are available after any possible and definite exposures to blood and body fluids.

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Safe work practices

Safe work procedures should be developed within the framework of risk identification, risk assessment and risk control. The implementation of effective controls impacts on many areas in the workplace, including the selection and purchasing of equipment, staffing, policy and procedures in the workplace, provision of information and training, and the recording and monitoring of exposures to blood or body fluids.

Work practices in accident and emergency departments need to take unpredictable incidents into account.

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