

Medical guidance notes and information

HIV/AIDS

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the human immune system, the body's defence against disease. A person with HIV may feel completely well and have no symptoms. However, over a period, the virus may damage the immune system and they may develop certain illnesses or cancers. When this happens, the person's condition has developed into Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

General Facts

HIV/AIDS can be passed on in four main ways:

1. During unprotected sex with an infected person.
2. Through sharing infected syringes, infected medical, dental instruments and tattooing equipment.
3. Through transfusions with HIV-infected blood.
4. HIV can be passed from an infected mother to her baby, before or during childbirth or through breastfeeding.

HIV/AIDS **cannot** be passed on through everyday social contact, insect bites, dirty food or crockery, nor activities such as kissing, coughing or sneezing.

There is still **no cure** for HIV/AIDS. There is antiretroviral medication that slows the progression from HIV to AIDS.

Infectivity

For someone to be infected with HIV, **three** things **must all** be present:

1. **Source:** body fluids from someone with HIV.
2. **Quantity:** only blood, seminal fluid, vaginal fluid and breast milk of someone with HIV could contain enough HIV to infect another person.
3. **Route:** there has to be a route for the HIV get into the blood stream of a person.

Treatment

Without drug treatment, HIV usually progresses to AIDS in an average of 11-12 years. HIV antiretroviral medication can prolong the time between HIV infection and the onset of AIDS considerably.

Prevention and protection

Given there is no cure for AIDS and people who have HIV may not know they have the condition, prevention and protection are highly recommended at all times. These are:

- Never share needles and only use sterile instruments or equipment.

G1193 A1 10/10/2011

Medical guidance notes and information

- Any situation requiring first aid, certain precautions must be taken to reduce the risk of transmitting any infection (such as Hepatitis B or HIV). First Aiders should always cover any exposed cuts or abrasions they may have with a waterproof dressing before treating a casualty and should wear protective gloves. They should wash their hands both before and after applying dressings.
- Always wear vinyl or latex rubber gloves before contact with blood, semen or other body fluids.
- Where blood, semen or other body fluids have to be mopped up, disposable paper towels should be used and then be placed in biohazard bags and safely disposed.
- If direct contact with another person's blood or other body fluids occurs, the area should be washed as soon as possible with soap and water. Clean cold tap water should be used if the lips, mouth, tongue, eyes or broken skin is affected and medical advice sought.
- Any person who sustains a needle stick injury or has an open wound that is exposed to someone's blood should follow the advice given in Occupational Health Guidance notes on Needle Stick Injuries below.

HIV and Work

There is no reason to treat workers with HIV infection differently. People infected with the virus who have not developed AIDS will not usually be ill and thus their ability to work normally will be unaffected. Those who go on to develop AIDS will suffer from severe illnesses that inevitably will affect performance. They should be treated in the same way as workers with other life threatening illnesses.

Employees with HIV/AIDS in safety critical posts are required to report their medications and dosages to their managers like other employees. They do not have to disclose their condition. Their manager will consult Occupational Health for advice on their fitness to work.

As there is no risk of transmission to customers, clients or colleagues during normal work activities there are no grounds for dismissing or otherwise discriminating against a worker purely on the basis of infection or suspected infection.

Revised February 2011 JC

G1193 A1 10/10/2011