

UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

What are "Universal Precautions"?

"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, or any number of other diseases. The best thing to do is treat the blood and body fluids of **EVERY PERSON** as **POTENTIALLY** infectious. These potentially infectious body fluids include blood, semen, and vaginal secretions.

The Basics of Universal Precautions.

Blood and body fluids – **ALWAYS** treat as potentially infectious. Clean up spills promptly using absorbant material first, then clean more thoroughly with a disinfectant.

Gloves – wear latex, vinyl or rubber disposable gloves when handling blood, body fluids, or when cleaning cuts, scrapes or wounds. Wash hands after removing gloves, and dispose of the gloves in a plastic bag. Add gloves to your first aid kit so they are always ready. They are not expensive, and can be bought at any drugstore.

Needlestick injuries – report to the Health Unit or hospital emergency department immediately.

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 container and then 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*.

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

Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, then wash your hands. Don't pass *your* germs on to others.

Teach others – particularly children about healthy behaviour and potential risks and how to deal with them safely.

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 blood or certain other body fluids. For example, if you help someone who has a bleeding nose you should wear vinyl or latex disposable gloves to protect



your skin. If this is not possible, continue to help the person and then wash immediately afterwards. Gloves are not necessarily required if you come into contact with urine, feces, nasal secretions, saliva, sweat, tears 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 absorbant 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 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?

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.

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 **NEVER** to touch needles, syringes or condoms, and to tell an adult about them immediately.

1. Use a pair of tongs or pliers, or a pair of puncture-proof 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 understand how important these necessary precautions are.

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 local Health unit or hospital Emergency Department immediately.

**REMEMBER -
ALL BLOOD AND BODY FLUIDS
ARE POTENTIALLY INFECTIOUS.**

UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

TO PREVENT TRANSMISSION OF BLOOD-BORNE DISEASES

Adapted for Child Care Settings



Wash your hands for 30 seconds after contact with blood and other body fluids contaminated with blood.



Cover cuts or scratches with a bandage until healed.



Use disposable absorbent material like paper towels to stop bleeding.

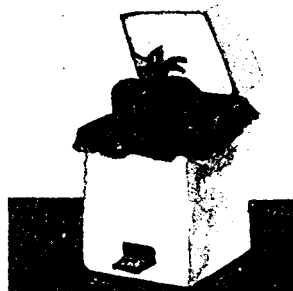
Wear disposable latex gloves when you encounter large amounts of blood, especially if you have open cuts or chapped skin. Wash your hands as soon as you remove your gloves.



Immediately clean up blood-soiled surfaces and **disinfect** with a fresh solution of one part bleach and nine parts water.



Discard blood-stained material in a sealed plastic bag and place in a lined, covered garbage container.



Put blood-stained laundry in sealed plastic bags. **Machine-wash** separately in hot soapy water.

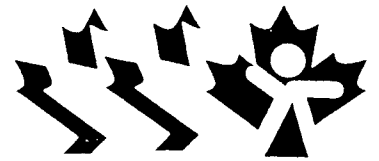


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NEVER DELAY EMERGENCY ACTION BECAUSE YOU CAN'T APPLY UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS. THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION OF BLOOD-BORNE DISEASES IS TOO SMALL TO JUSTIFY ENDANGERING A CHILD.



HIV/AIDS AND CHILD CARE

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), the virus that leads to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), is not transmitted through everyday contact. HIV is a fragile virus, and no cases of transmission through casual contact have been reported in a child care setting anywhere in the world.

HIV is not transmitted by:

- touching, hugging, or kissing;
- sharing food, dishes, drinking glasses, or cutlery;
- being coughed, sneezed, or cried on;
- sharing toys, even those that have been mouthed; diapers or toilet seats;
- urine, stool, vomit, saliva, mucus, or sweat (as long as it is untainted by blood).

HIV is transmitted from one person to another by sperm, vaginal secretions, breast milk, blood, and body fluids containing blood, usually through

unprotected sexual intercourse or the sharing of contaminated needles. It is also transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy or delivery or by breastfeeding.

Simple contact between blood and intact skin is not enough to transmit HIV. Three conditions are necessary for transmission:

- The blood must be fresh.
- There must be a sufficient quantity.
- It must have a route of entry into the bloodstream of the uninfected person.

Biting often concerns parents, but there has never been a confirmed case of transmission by biting. To risk transmission, a child infected with HIV would have to have fresh blood in his mouth and break the skin of an uninfected child. An uninfected biter would have a theoretical risk of exposure only if he broke the skin of a child infected with HIV and drew blood into his mouth. Such events are very unlikely.

Parents also worry about accidents and fights, but fresh blood-to-blood contact among children is extremely unusual.

Children infected with HIV have the same right to attend child care as other children. HIV is considered a disability, and by law discrimination on the basis of disability is not allowed. Staff also cannot be discriminated against, fired, or non-renewed because of their HIV status.

Child care plays an important role in the lives of children infected with HIV, offering them peers, stimulation, stability, and the chance to learn new skills. A child's parents, physician and social worker will decide whether child care is suitable and monitor the child's progress.

Child care staff probably will not know if a child is infected with HIV. Many children have no symptoms, and if no one in the family has been diagnosed as HIV-positive, the family may not even suspect that the child has the virus.

If the parents know, they have no obligation to tell the centre. Because they may fear discrimination, they may keep the information to themselves. If they decide to tell an educator, he or she has an ethical obligation to keep the information confidential. There is no need for the parents of other children to know since a child with HIV poses no danger.

It is important for child care centres to develop a health policy that respects the rights of all children and staff to privacy and confidentiality. For everyone's protection, the policy should include the use of universal precautions and proper hygiene, procedures for informing parents about contagious diseases, and procedures for excluding sick children and children with serious behaviour problems.

UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS Adapted for Child Care Settings

The best way to control the spread of any infection is to practise proper hygiene. Where blood is involved, it is also important to use universal precautions, the measures developed to deal with blood-borne diseases like HIV and hepatitis B.

- Wash hands immediately after exposure to blood.
- Cover cuts.
- Use absorbent material to stop bleeding.
- Wear disposable latex gloves when there is a lot of blood or if you have open cuts. Wash hands immediately after removing gloves.
- Immediately clean blood-soiled surfaces and disinfect with bleach solution. (Household bleach kills HIV.)
- Machine-wash blood-stained laundry separately in hot soapy water.
- Place blood-stained materials in sealed plastic bags and discard in a lined, covered garbage container.

Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver. It is caused by a virus.

What are the Symptoms of Hepatitis A?

After the hepatitis virus enters your body, it can take anywhere from 15 to 50 days before you may feel sick. The symptoms can be so mild that many people are not aware that they have the disease. Other people get sick with some of these symptoms:

- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- Dark urine
- A tired feeling (like you have the flu)
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Clay-coloured bowel movements
- A sore feeling in the upper-right stomach area
- Yellowing of the skin and eyeballs

The symptoms may last from 1-2 weeks to several months. Most people recover completely and then are immune to re-infection.

A blood test is necessary to diagnose Hepatitis A.

How is Hepatitis A Spread?

The Hepatitis A virus is found in the bowel movements of infected persons, even though they may not know they are ill. People who go to the bathroom and then don't wash their hands properly can pass the disease to others through food preparation or other hand/mouth contacts. Once infected, a person can pass the virus on to others for two weeks or more before they even know they are sick themselves. And, they are still infectious for up to one week after they get sick.

Hepatitis A can be caught by drinking dirty water, or by eating shellfish such as crabs, clams, oysters or mussels that have been exposed to sewage. This disease can also be spread by sexual activities where feces may enter the mouth.

Many people who catch this disease may never feel ill at all, but they are still able to spread the Hepatitis A virus. This means that they can make other persons sick, even if they feel fine themselves.

How Can I Prevent Hepatitis A?

Protect yourself against Hepatitis A and other gastrointestinal germs by always washing your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, before preparing meals, and before eating. Do not share food, drinks or cigarettes.

If you have had close contact with someone who has Hepatitis A, a shot called "Immune Globulin" can prevent you from getting sick. This shot must be given within 14 days of your contact with the ill person. Immune Globulin is provided free in these cases, and can be given by the public health nurse or your family doctor.

Hepatitis A Protection for Travel

- Proper hygiene and taking precautions with food and drink are important.
- Avoid peeled fruit and raw vegetables, salads, dairy products with unpasteurized milk, and raw or undercooked meat, fish and shellfish and any food sold by street vendors.
- Swim only in chlorinated pools.
- See the Health File "Preventing Traveller's Diarrhea (41e)" for directions for treating water to make it safe for drinking.



Is there a Vaccine to Protect Against Hepatitis A?

There is a vaccine available (Havrix) which protects people against Hepatitis A. It is given as a series of three shots in the arm, the first two shots given one month apart and the third 6 - 12 months after the first. Protection begins about four weeks after the first shot. The vaccine provides excellent protection against Hepatitis A for at least three years. It works well in all age groups except infants under six months of age.

Who should be vaccinated?

The vaccine is provided free to persons with haemophilia A or B who are receiving plasma-derived replacement clotting factors and who are not already immune to Hepatitis A. A blood test is needed to know if they are immune.

The vaccine is recommended for people who are likely to come in contact with the Hepatitis A virus. This includes persons who will be living, working or travelling in developing countries for extended periods, particularly rural areas. Two shots need to be given before travel, with the first at least four weeks before arrival in the high risk area. The third shot is given upon return. In some cases, Immune Globulin may be given instead of, or in addition to, the vaccine. It provides immediate protection.

The vaccine is also recommended for:

- Residents and staff of institutions for the developmentally challenged;
- Zoo keepers, veterinarians and researchers who handle non-human primates;
- Homosexual males with multiple sex partners; and
- Those who use IV drugs in unsanitary conditions.

The Health Unit/Department will not give the vaccine to anyone with a fever or severe infectious illness, to anyone with a known sensitivity to any part of the vaccine, or to anyone with a previous allergic reaction to the vaccine. It is not recommended for pregnant women because its safety in pregnancy is not known.

Is the Hepatitis A Vaccine Safe?

Yes. Reactions to the vaccine tend to be very mild and short-lasting. Reactions may include soreness, redness and swelling at the injection site. A person may have a headache, fever, nausea and lack of appetite. All side effects should be reported to your local Health Unit, clinic or family doctor.

What if I Already Am Sick With Hepatitis A?

If you already have Hepatitis A you will need to get lots of rest.

Drinking lots of fluids and eating good meals will also help you become healthy again. If you feel sick to your stomach or have a poor appetite, it might help to eat smaller meals and eat more often. **No alcohol** should be taken when you are ill because it may further inflame your liver. Avoid any kind of hard work or exercise. Your family doctor can give you specific directions or medical treatment that you need.

If food handling is part of your job, you may need to take some time off work.

If you think that you have Hepatitis A, contact your local Health Unit/Department or your family doctor for further information.

If you have any questions about Hepatitis A or the Immune Globulin shot, please call your public health unit or department or your family doctor.

Hepatitis B

What Is Hepatitis B?

- A disease caused by a virus.
- The virus attacks the liver.
- While some infections are mild or inapparent, it can also make you very sick and sometimes you can die.
- It can cause permanent liver damage and scarring.
- It can go on to long lasting liver disease.
- It is the number one cause of liver cancer.
- There are increasing numbers of cases here in B.C.; most new cases are in young adults.

How Can You Tell If You Have Hepatitis B?

- After the virus enters your body, it can take six weeks to six months (but usually 2-3 months) to develop signs of illness.
- Half of all people who catch hepatitis B can't tell they have the disease.
- Whether you have signs of illness or not, if you have the virus in your body you can pass it on to others.
- Signs of illness may be: tiredness, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, tenderness in the upper right side of the stomach area, dark colored urine, clay colored stools and a yellowing of skin and eyeballs (jaundice).
- Symptoms may last from one to four weeks, but it may be as long as six months before you feel well again.

- Some people, even after six months, are not able to get rid of the virus and may carry the virus in their bodies for months or even years after the signs of illness have passed. These people are called chronic hepatitis B carriers.
- Your doctor can arrange a blood test to tell hepatitis B from other types of hepatitis, which have similar symptoms to hepatitis B.

How Is The Hepatitis B Virus Spread?

- Hepatitis B virus is spread from an infected person to another by:
 - blood-to-blood contact, e.g. accidentally poking yourself with a used needle and syringe, or sharing needles or "rigs"
 - intimate sexual contact
 - sharing a toothbrush or razor (much less common)
 - mother to newborn during delivery, unless the baby is given vaccine after being born.

It is NOT spread by sneezing, coughing, hugging or using the same dishes or cutlery.

Is There A Treatment For Hepatitis B Infection?

At present there is no treatment which can rid the body of infection with hepatitis B virus. If you are infected with hepatitis B, some of the ways to help your body to recover are rest, good nutrition, staying away from alcohol, and following your doctor's advice.



How Can You Protect Yourself From Infection With The Hepatitis B Virus?

- Always use a condom, limit number of partners or abstain from having sex.
- Avoid intravenous drug use and *DONOT* share needles.
- Have yourself vaccinated if you are a sexual partner of someone with hepatitis B, or are at risk for needlestick injuries or blood contact, or have a chronic carrier in your household.

If you know you have recently been exposed to the hepatitis B virus, contact your local health department or family doctor and they will advise you of ways to stop the disease from developing.

The Ministry of Health has implemented a long term strategy to control this disease in the population by immunizing children at a stage in life before they are exposed to at-risk behaviour. Since 1992, the hepatitis B vaccine has been offered to all students in the province in Grade Six.

Is The Hepatitis B Vaccine Safe?

- Hepatitis B vaccine is one of the safest vaccines used today.
- Side effects are minor and happen rarely.

Possible Reactions To The Vaccine Include:

- Redness, soreness, warmth, and swelling in the arm where you are vaccinated
- Crankiness
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite

The Health Unit Will NOT Administer Hepatitis B Vaccine To You If You Have:

- A history of allergy to any part of the vaccine, e.g. thimerosal
- Signs of illness
- Fever

If you have any further questions about Hepatitis B or Hepatitis B vaccine, please talk to your local public health nurse or family doctor.

Hepatitis C

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. This virus has only been identified recently and is found in the blood and tissues of infected people. Since 1990, all donated blood and blood products in Canada have been tested for hepatitis C.

What happens to people who catch Hepatitis C?

Some people who are infected with this virus feel healthy and don't even know they have the disease. Other people will get symptoms of hepatitis, usually six to nine weeks after they get the virus. These symptoms may include:

- Feeling tired;
- Yellow skin or eyes (jaundice);
- Dark urine;
- Loss of appetite;
- Nausea (sick to your stomach).

Nine out of ten infected people cannot clear the virus from their body, and may continue to spread it to others long after they have been infected themselves. Some of these people will develop a serious liver disease — usually scarring called cirrhosis — about ten years or more after infection. A few may develop liver cancer after about 20 or 30 years.

How can I tell if I have Hepatitis C?

After the hepatitis C virus infects your body, antibodies appear in your blood to help fight the infection. A special blood test can detect these antibodies and show if you have been infected with the hepatitis C virus in the past. However, these tests do not show whether or not you are still carrying the virus in your body. So, anyone who has tested positive for the virus should assume they are still infected and can infect other people.

How is the Hepatitis C virus spread?

The virus is spread mainly through contact with the blood of an infected person. For example, you can catch the virus by:

- Sharing needles;
- Accidentally poking yourself with a used needle;
- Sharing toothbrushes or razors, especially if a person has bleeding gums or a cut;
- Getting a transfusion of blood or blood products in a country where the blood supply is not tested for hepatitis C.

It is possible to get infected with the hepatitis C virus during sex, but it is not as easy to catch this way as it is with the Hepatitis B virus or HIV, the virus which causes AIDS. It is also possible for an infected woman to pass it to her baby when she gives birth, however this is unusual. In some cases a person may never know how he or she got the virus.



Is there a treatment for Hepatitis C?

At present, there is no treatment to stop you from getting hepatitis C if you have been exposed to the virus through one of the ways mentioned above.

If you do get hepatitis, it is really important to eat healthy meals, get lots of rest, avoid alcohol and take only drugs recommended by your doctor.

For some people with ongoing liver disease from hepatitis C, a drug called interferon has been helpful. It is not known whether the good effects from interferon are long-lasting.

What If I Have a Positive Hepatitis C Blood Test?

You should see your family doctor to confirm the diagnosis and follow up with any additional tests or examinations. If you are confirmed as having been exposed to the virus, it is best for you to assume that you may still be carrying the virus and can infect other people.

If you have tested positive for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus, you should take the following precautions so you can't spread the virus to others:

- Do not donate blood, organs, or sperm;
- Do not share needles, razors or toothbrushes;
- Cover any cuts or open areas on your skin;

- Advise your dentist, your doctor, and anyone else who might come in contact with your blood that you are positive for hepatitis C;
- Talk to your sexual partner about your hepatitis C infection. Your partner may wish to be tested for hepatitis C. If your partner has not been infected with hepatitis C, using a condom for every act of intercourse will help prevent your partner from being infected with hepatitis C or other sexually transmitted diseases. Even if your partner already has hepatitis C, the regular use of condoms helps prevent other sexually transmitted diseases from spreading.

**For further information,
contact your public health
nurse or family doctor.**

HTLV-1 Virus

What is HTLV-I?

HTLV-I is a virus that infects the blood in humans. It causes diseases of the nervous system and leukaemia.

Is this a new disease?

No. We've known about this disease for some time (first described in 1980). It's been identified in Southern Japan, the Caribbean, Africa and South and North America. It's also been found in a few British Columbians.

How can you tell if you have HTLV-I?

The virus infects the white cells in the blood. Less than four per cent of people who get HTLV-I will eventually get sick with HTLV-I-associated illness in their lifetime. All of the rest of the people carrying the virus will have no symptoms and will not develop any health problems from this virus.

In those rare cases where people do get sick, the symptoms are characterized by a loss of strength in the lower limbs and loss of bladder control, or by the onset of leukaemia.

How is the virus spread?

HTLV-I is spread from an infected person to another by:

- Sharing needles and syringes or "rigs";
- Sexual contact. Evidence suggests that the virus is more easily transmitted from men to women than from women to men;

- Mother to child. About one quarter of mothers who are infected with HTLV-I may transmit the virus to their babies at birth or through breastfeeding.

Should I breastfeed?

Yes. Breast milk is one of nature's most perfect foods. The benefits to a new baby from breastfeeding are much greater than the very small chance that a breastfed baby may get sick from the virus later in her or his adult life.

How can I protect myself against infection from HTLV-I?

The same precautions that everyone should take to protect themselves against infection from HIV or Hepatitis B apply to HTLV-I.

In other words:

- Don't share needles;
- Always use a latex condom, especially if you have sex with more than one person.

As with HIV and Hepatitis B, there is evidence that HTLV-I is NOT spread by ordinary, every day household contacts such as kissing, using the toilet, or preparing food. In order for the disease to spread, there has to be blood-to-blood contact or sexual intercourse.



Is there any treatment for HTLV-I infection?

No. There is no way to get rid of the virus once you are infected with it.

Is the Canadian blood supply safe?

Yes. The Red Cross has been screening all blood donations for HTLV-I since April 1990.

Should I get tested?

No, unless you have a disease which your doctor thinks requires testing, or you are a contact of a known case.

*For further information,
contact your local
public health nurse,
or your doctor.*