

AIDS and the workplace / NUPE Public Service Workers.

Contributors

NUPE (Organization)

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MORE INFORMATION

NUPE sends out regular circulars to branches with information on health and safety aspects for staff dealing with AIDS.

Further information, advice and free booklets are available from the following:

'AIDS and Employment',

Department of Employment/HSE
Mailing House, Leeland Road, London
W13 9HL.

'Children at school and problems related to AIDS'

Department of Education and Science
Publications Despatch Centre,
Honeypot Lane, Stanmore, Middlesex
HA7 1AZ

'AIDS – Guidance for Educational Establishments in Scotland'

SED Room 209C, 43 Jeffrey Street,
Edinburgh, EH1 1DH.

'AIDS – What Everybody Needs to Know',

Health Education Council, 78 New
Oxford Street, London WC1A 1AH.

'Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens – Revised Guidelines 1986.'

DHSS Store, Health Publications Unit,
No 2 site, Manchester Rd, Heywood,
Lancs. CL10 1PZ

Department of Health and Social Security AIDS Unit

Alexander Fleming House, Elephant
and Castle, London SE1 6BY
☎ 01-407 5522

Healthline Telephone Service

☎ 01-981 2717 or 0345 581151

Welsh AIDS Campaign

☎ 0222-464121

Scottish AIDS Monitor

☎ 031 558 1167

Haemophilia Society ☎ 01-928 2020

Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA)

1-4 Hatton Place, London EC1N 8ND.
☎ 01-430 2341

Terrence Higgins Trust BM/AIDS

London WC1N 3XX Helpline
☎ 01-833 2971

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard ☎ 01-837 7324



*Britains
Caring Union*

NUPE
PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS



AND THE WORKPLACE

A NUPE HEALTH AND SAFETY PUBLICATION

What you need to know

AIDS is a deadly disease but it can only be transmitted in very limited ways.

Ordinary social and work contact with an infected person is safe for both colleagues and the public.

If your job involves caring for people with AIDS, it is important that you follow the correct health and safety procedures when dealing with the blood or body fluids of the infected person and any contaminated materials – but otherwise you are in no danger of catching the AIDS virus.

How AIDS is spread

AIDS is caused by a virus called HIV. Infected people have this virus in their blood and other body fluids. The virus does not survive long outside the body and is killed by simple household bleach. There is no evidence that AIDS can be caught from tears or saliva of an infected person.

AIDS can be spread:

- by sexual intercourse with an infected person when blood, semen and vaginal fluids can be exchanged.
- when infected blood or body fluids get into your bloodstream, e.g. inoculation with a contaminated needle.
- from an infected mother to her baby.

The main risk to NUPE members at work comes from accidental inoculation or contamination of an open cut or graze with the blood or body fluids of an infected person.

- The virus is **not** spread through the air or by touch.
- It is **not** passed by coughing, sneezing or shaking hands.
- It is **safe** to share cups, knives and forks.
- It is **safe** to share washing and toilet facilities.

People with AIDS need care, support and understanding. Misplaced fear and staff refusing to work alongside those with the AIDS virus only causes unnecessary suffering.

AIDS is no excuse for prejudice and discrimination.

Staff who need to know should be told if a patient or client is infected with HIV or suffers from AIDS. This information must be kept strictly confidential. Any member of staff who breaks this confidentiality may be subject to disciplinary action by their employer.

HOME HELPS AND COMMUNITY STAFF

You can be quite sure of being safe when working in the home of someone who has AIDS by following these guidelines.

General household cleaning

Normal standards of hygiene will protect you from the AIDS virus and other household germs. It makes sense to wash up in water hot enough to need gloves, using detergent. Use different cleaning cloths and gloves for kitchen and bathroom.

Dealing with blood and vomit

If possible these should be cleaned up by the person they came from. If you have to clean them up, wear rubber gloves (check they have no holes) and a plastic or plastic-coated apron. Dispose of blood, vomit or excrement down the toilet, clean surfaces with household bleach (1 measure of bleach to 10 measures of water), and disposable cloths. Dispose of cloths down the toilet or in plastic bags (see "disposal of waste"). After cleaning up, wash your gloves in very hot water, then wash your hands with soap and hot water.

Washing clothes and linen

Wash clothes and bedding on the hot wash cycle in a washing machine. Heavily soiled bedding should be handled wearing rubber gloves and sent to the local authority laundry service.

Disposal of waste

Household rubbish is not a risk and can be disposed of in the normal way. Used tissues and tampons should be flushed down the toilet. Soiled dressings and sanitary towels should be burnt. If this cannot be done in your client's home, the dressings etc. should be sealed inside two yellow plastic bags, one inside the other. Special arrangements should be made for the local authority to collect and incinerate this waste.

Injection needles

If your client uses injection needles, be very careful not to prick yourself on one of these. Your client should dispose of used needles in a puncture-proof container or wrapping. Your client should sterilise non-disposable needles in the normal way.

Accidental splashes

If you accidentally get your client's blood or excrement on your skin, there is no cause for alarm, wash thoroughly with soap and hot water. Cover cuts or grazes with waterproof dressings. Report any accidents you have to your supervisor and make sure it is recorded.

Consideration for your client

As people with AIDS cannot fight off infections very well you should not visit them if you are ill. Ask your department's doctor if you are in any doubt.

WORKING WITH CHILDREN

There are a small number of children who caught the AIDS virus from infected blood transfusions or blood products before these were routinely tested. Mothers who have the AIDS virus are likely to pass it on to their babies before they are born or possibly by breast-feeding them.

Children with the AIDS virus are not a risk to staff or other children and should be allowed to attend nurseries and schools normally. But some special precautions should be taken if an infected child bleeds vomits or is incontinent.

General hygiene

The virus is not passed on knives and forks or crockery and these should be washed in hot water and detergent as normal. When cleaning toilets and showers or baths, use separate gloves and cloths. No special disinfectants are needed. Cover cuts and grazes with waterproof dressings to protect against any household germs.

Dealing with blood and vomit

When cleaning these up, wear rubber gloves (check they have no holes) and a plastic or plastic-coated apron. Dispose of blood, vomit or excrement down the toilet, clean surfaces with household bleach (1 measure of bleach to 10 measures of water), and disposable cloths. Dispose of cloths down the toilet or in plastic bags (see "disposal of waste"). After cleaning up, wash your gloves in very hot water, then wash your hands with soap and hot water.



Washing clothes and nappies

Clothes and linen that are soiled with blood etc. should be washed on the hot wash cycle in a washing machine, or boiled before handwashing.

Disposal of infected waste

Used tissues and tampons can be flushed down the toilet. Soiled dressings, sanitary towels and disposable nappies should be burnt. If this cannot be done where you work, the infected rubbish should be sealed inside two yellow plastic bags, one inside the other. Special arrangements should be made for the local authority to collect and incinerate this waste. Potties should be emptied down the toilet. Wash potties and dry with paper towels. Disinfectants are not needed. Kitchen and household-type rubbish should be disposed of in the normal way.

Bites and scratches

There is a small risk of contracting the AIDS virus if an infected child (or adult) becomes violent and causes both you and themselves to bleed. If a mentally disturbed child has AIDS or AIDS virus infection, advice should be sought from your local authority medical service.

If you do get infected blood on your skin, wash it off with soap and hot water. Report any accidents to your supervisor and make sure it is recorded.

SWIMMING POOLS

You cannot catch AIDS by sharing a swimming pool with people infected with AIDS virus. The virus does not "wash-off" infected people into the water. Chlorine added to pool water is effective disinfectant against the AIDS virus and other germs.

Swimming pool staff who are required to clean up blood and other body fluids should take these precautions against infections.

- Cover cuts and grazes with waterproof dressings.

- Wear rubber gloves to clean up and wash hands afterwards.

- Use household bleach (1 measure to 10 measures of water) to disinfect surfaces contaminated with blood, urine etc. Use disposable cloths and put into a plastic bag before disposal.

- Towels should be washed on the hot wash cycle in a washing machine.

WORKING IN SEWERS AND TREATMENT WORKS

The AIDS virus has not been found in excrement from infected people. However, there may be a very small risk if the excrement contains infected blood which could enter your bloodstream. If you follow the guidelines here, there is no risk of catching the AIDS virus or other diseases such as Weils' disease.

Wear protective clothing

Always wear gloves and overalls, and boots if necessary, check gloves for holes or tears before putting them on. Carry spare protective clothing in case yours is damaged.

Cover cuts and grazes

Cover cuts and grazes with waterproof dressings. Make sure your first aid kit includes these dressings and a disinfectant suitable for wounds.

Clean up after work

Shower or wash all over when you have finished work. Washing facilities should be provided at the worksite where possible. Protective clothing should also be cleaned before it is stored away. Always wash your hands before eating, drinking or smoking. These precautions will protect against water-borne germs.

Accidents

Always report any accident and make sure it is recorded. Clean and disinfect cuts and cover with a waterproof dressing. You will not get the AIDS virus from a dirty cut or wound, but you might pick up a different infection like Weils' disease from rat urine. You will not catch AIDS from accidentally swallowing dirty water.

Clean water carries no risk of AIDS at all.

UNIVERSITY STAFF

Contact with students and staff

AIDS cannot be caught through social or work contact, even with people who are carrying the virus. These guidelines are sensible precautions to protect staff against the AIDS virus and other germs.

Cleaning and catering staff

All crockery and cutlery should be washed in hot water and detergent, as normal. No special precautions are necessary when cleaning except when cleaning up blood or vomit. For this wear rubber gloves and clean surfaces with household bleach (1 measure of bleach to 10 measures of water) and disposable cloths. Put cloths into plastic bags and arrange for them to be incinerated if possible. When cleaning toilets, use different gloves and cloths from the ones you use in kitchens. No special toilet or sink cleaners are necessary. After cleaning, wash your gloves in hot water, then wash your hands with soap and water.

Laundry

Bedding and towels carry no risk of infection, unless heavily contaminated with blood. Handle contaminated linen wearing rubber gloves, put it into a plastic bag and mark it with a suitable label for the laundry. Linen that is contaminated with blood should be washed on the hot wash cycle.

Security and portering staff

There is a small risk of catching the AIDS virus if you are assaulted by someone with the virus, causing

both you and themselves to bleed. Bites and scratches from an infected person also carry a slight risk. If the wound is not serious, allow to bleed freely then wash with soap and water and cover with a suitable dressing. If the injury is serious, seek medical help immediately.

First Aiders

There have been no recorded cases of AIDS being transmitted by giving mouth to mouth resuscitation. However, first aiders should be taught how to use resuscitation equipment such as the Brooke Airway and this equipment should be made really available to first aiders.

■ IS IT TRUE THAT ...?

Is AIDS a Gay Disease?

No At the moment the majority of people in this country with the AIDS virus are gay men but in other countries this is not the case. It just hit the gay male community first. Anyone can get AIDS from infected blood or body fluids entering their body. That is why it is important for us all to follow safe working practices. Talk of a 'gay plague' is just prejudice or ignorance.

Is it dangerous to work with someone who has the AIDS virus?

No The virus cannot be passed on in normal work situations or through usual social contacts. Only a minority with the virus itself have developed AIDS. There is no danger in working alongside someone with the virus or with AIDS itself.

Can you catch AIDS from cups, saucers, cutlery? **No**

Can you catch AIDS from sharing toilet facilities? **No**

Can you catch AIDS from shaking hands? **No**

Can you catch AIDS from coughs and sneezes? **No**

Is it dangerous for those with the AIDS virus to handle food or be in contact with the public in their job?

No The virus is only passed on through infected blood, semen or vaginal fluids. If proper hygiene precautions are taken there is no danger in handling foodstuffs, or in carrying on with any other job. There should be no employment discrimination against those with the AIDS virus.

Is it dangerous for children with the AIDS virus to attend school?

No There should be no danger in children attending school and participating in normal school activities. The Dept. of Education has produced detailed guidance for schools to follow to make sure there are no problems.

