

Steps for Protection against Germs and Disease

There are important steps we should all take to prevent germs from spreading between people. Following these steps will help to protect others and ourselves when we come into contact with blood or body fluids.

It is not possible to tell if a person may be infected with HIV, 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. This includes all body fluids, except sweat.

Best practices to always follow

Blood and Body Fluids – If you come into contact with blood and body fluids, *always* treat them as potentially infectious. Clean up spills quickly using absorbent material first, such as paper towels. Then clean more thoroughly with soap and water. Finally, disinfect with household bleach.

Gloves – Use clean, disposable gloves when handling any 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.

Needlestick Injuries – Wash the area with warm soapy water. Do not squeeze the wound or soak it in bleach. Go to the nearest health unit or hospital emergency department immediately for care.

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. Handle bedding or clothing soiled with body fluids cautiously, and wash in hot soapy water.

Hand washing is the best 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. Waterless alcohol-based hand rinses can be used as long as hands aren't heavily soiled.

Always Wash Hands:

- Before preparing food and after handling uncooked foods
- Before eating or smoking
- Before breastfeeding
- After toileting or diapering
- Before and after providing first aid
- After handling blood or body fluids
- Before and after providing care to an ill person

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

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

How can you keep yourself safe?

The guidelines outlined here are important to follow to keep yourself protected from germs. Blood or body fluids splashed on your skin are very unlikely to cause infection unless you have fresh cuts or raw chapped areas. If you are exposed to blood or other body fluids, protect yourself by wearing disposable gloves. If this is not possible, continue to help the person, and then wash immediately afterwards.

Remember, it is important to always 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 gloves or rubber work gloves. If there is a risk of splashing, use protective eye wear.
2. Use disposable absorbent material, such as paper towels, to clean most of the spill. Place these in a plastic bag and put in the garbage.
3. Clean the surface using soap and water to remove any remaining blood or body fluids.
4. Wipe contaminated surfaces with a disinfectant solution. Mixing one part household bleach to nine parts of water makes a good solution. This type of bleach solution should be freshly made up before use 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 cloths used for cleaning in a disinfectant for 20 minutes, or wash in hot water and detergent.
5. When you are finished, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water.

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

A needle that someone else has used may contain a small amount of his or her blood, which could carry HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C virus. Used condoms can also contain infectious body fluids.

Teach children to **NEVER** touch needles, syringes or condoms, and to tell an adult immediately if they have found one.

If you find a used syringe or condom, especially in a park, school or playground, 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. Do not place these containers in your recycling bin.

4. When you have finished, wash your hands carefully with soap and warm 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. Do not squeeze.
- Wash the area well with soap and water.
- Do not soak the wound in bleach.
- Go to the nearest local health unit or hospital emergency department immediately for care.

Remember - all blood and body fluids from any person are potentially infectious.



BC Centre for Disease Control
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