

Guidelines for Protecting Health Care Workers from Infectious Diseases

You can't tell whether someone is infected or not with a disease like HIV or hepatitis B just by looking at them. Using universal precautions means that we protect ourselves as if every client we care for could have hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or HIV/AIDS. Universal precautions are a kind of infection control that protects our clients and us.

What kinds of precautions are you talking about?

- Wash your hands often. Washing your hands is the single best way to kill germs. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water before putting on latex gloves and immediately after taking off the gloves. Wash your hands immediately if you touch anybody's blood, urine, feces, vomit, semen, or vaginal fluid.
- Treat all blood and other bodily fluids - including urine, feces, and vomit - as if they contained the hepatitis B virus, the hepatitis C virus, or the AIDS virus.
- Cuts, sores, or breaks in the caregiver's skin or the client's skin should be covered with bandages.
- Bag soiled laundry in a leakproof plastic bag and tie it shut to avoid contaminating the floor or other surfaces. Wear gloves when handling or sorting laundry. When carrying the bag, do not hug it close to your body. If it's leaking, you don't want to be contaminated.
- Wear latex gloves when there is a chance of being in contact with blood or other bodily fluids. Wearing gloves is especially important when you have a cut or rash on your hands because any tear in your skin can allow the virus to get into your body. Some people are allergic to the powder in gloves or the latex. If you are one of those people, there are other kinds of gloves that will work, such as powderless gloves or nitrile gloves.
- Wear a mask and eye protection during job tasks likely to splash or spray blood or bodily fluids – like emptying a Foley catheter, caring for a draining wound, or disconnecting a feeding tube.
- Avoid handling sharp objects (such as razors or needles) that might have come in contact with blood or bodily fluids. Dispose of them carefully by placing them in a puncture-resistant container for disposal (also called a sharp container or red box).