

Universal Precautions Against Infection

What are universal precautions?

Universal precautions are guidelines you can follow to help prevent the spread of infection. Follow these guidelines if you are caring for someone with an infection such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, or tuberculosis (TB).

Infections are caused by viruses, bacteria, parasites, and fungi that can be spread through:

- Body fluids such as blood, saliva, mucus, pus, semen and other sexual fluids, urine, and bowel movements
- Droplets breathed, sneezed, or coughed out from the nose or mouth
- Skin to skin contact
- Sexual contact

What precautions should I follow if I take care of an infected person at home?

Gloves

- Wear latex or polyurethane medical gloves when:
 - You touch the person's nose, mouth, genital area, rectum, or infected areas of skin. Also wear gloves when you touch body fluids such as blood, bowel movements, urine, drainage from a wound, saliva, or vomit.
 - You handle items soiled with blood or body fluids, such as clothing, bed linens, or towels.
 - You clean or bandage an open sore.
 - You give medicine to the person you are caring for with a needle or a feeding tube, or if your hands will be near their mouth, such as when you help them swallow pills.
 - You clean up an area where the person has been, like the bedroom or bathroom.
- If a glove gets torn or damaged, take your gloves off and wash your hands. If you are not done caring for the person, put on new gloves.
- Put new gloves on each time you care for the person.
- Do not wash gloves. Throw them out after each use. Put gloves soiled with blood in a separate trash bag, not in with regular trash.

Gloves do not take the place of hand washing. Always wash your hands after you take the gloves off.

Hand washing

- Wash your hands right before each contact with the infected person. Be sure you wash the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your fingernails.

- If you get blood or body fluid on your hands or any other part of your body, wash well right away.
- Wash your hands with soap and water right after you take your gloves off.

Protective clothing

- Wear a surgical mask and protective eyewear during any task that may expose you to blood or other body fluids. This protects your mouth, nose, and eyes from infection.
- Wear a disposable gown or apron when blood or body fluids may splash.

Safe use of needles

- Use disposable needles if you can.
- Do not bend needles or try to put the cap back on them.
- Discard needles as directed by your healthcare provider. Put used needles in a puncture-proof container. Don't let the container get too full.
- If you accidentally stick yourself with a used needle, contact your healthcare provider right away. You may need to be tested for infection or given prompt treatment.

Disposal of waste products and washing of soiled linens

- Put gloves, tissues, or other waste items soiled with blood or other body fluids in a separate bag from your regular trash. The bag should be sealed and leak-proof. For example, use 2 bags, putting one inside the other. Follow your local health department's instructions for disposing waste products.
- Check with your healthcare provider and local health department before you pour blood or other body fluids down the drain. If it's OK to pour these fluids down the drain, be very careful not to splash any of the blood or fluid on your skin or nearby surfaces.
- Wash all linens (Including cloth gowns and aprons) or clothing soiled with blood or other body fluids separately from other laundry. Use detergent and germicide. Follow your local health department's instructions for safe washing and disposal of the water.

Guidelines for killing germs with germicides

- Use chemical germicides registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA has tested these products to make sure that they do kill germs.
- Ask your healthcare provider or local health department what products are safe to use at home.
- Use these products as directed. Some germicides are very strong and may build up fumes or catch fire if not used correctly.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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