

PREVENTION & STANDARD PRECAUTIONS

WHAT ARE STANDARD PRECAUTIONS?

Standard precautions refer to practices that are applied to the care of everyone, regardless of their known or perceived infection, to minimise the transmission of any infection. Standard precautions prevent transmission of infections from carers to people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and from people with HIV to carers. Standard precautions can be practised easily and effectively by carers and care workers in all settings: the home, the community, and in respite and residential settings.

Remove gloves after care is completed and wash your hands. Continuing to work with the same pair of gloves is just as bad as not washing your hands.

For the home, buy disposable gloves from the supermarket or chemist. In residential settings, these should be provided by the employer.

STANDARD PRECAUTIONS ARE USED WHEN YOU ANTICIPATE CONTACT WITH:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blood• All other body fluids (excluding sweat) regardless of whether they contain visible blood• Non-intact skin• Bodily membranes.
USING STANDARD PRECAUTIONS MEANS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• effective hand washing• the use of personal protective equipment, for example:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– wearing gloves if contact with blood or body fluids is likely– wearing a plastic apron if splashes are likely to occur• safe handling and disposal of sharps such as needles• cleaning and disinfecting blood or body fluid accidents or spills• safe disposal of waste and used equipment• appropriate handling of soiled linen.

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF INFECTION:

Infections can be spread in many different ways so protecting yourself is the best policy. Practices known as standard precautions prevent transmission from carers to clients/residents and from clients/residents to carers.

Effective Hand Washing

Effective hand washing means taking the following steps:

- **Wet** your hands under running water and apply soap
- **Rub** your hands together for at least 15 seconds, ensuring fingertips, thumbs and the areas between your fingers are washed
- **Rinse** your hands under running water then dry them thoroughly on disposable paper towel or a clean towel

Accidental Contact

If you accidentally come in contact with blood or other body fluids, take the following steps:

- **Skin:** Immediately wash away the blood or fluid from the affected area using soap and running water. Alcohol-based hand rub can be used if soap and water are not readily available.
- **Eyes:** If your eyes are contaminated, rinse them under running tap water (keep eyes open while rinsing) for at least 30 seconds
- **Mouth:** Spit out then rinse mouth with water several times

If you have a needle stick injury or are cut with a sharp object contaminated with blood or body fluids, immediately wash away the blood or body fluid from the affected area using running water. Seek medical attention, ideally within two hours.

There is evidence that people with HIV who are on antiretroviral therapy (ART) and have an undetectable viral load are highly unlikely to transmit HIV. There is also treatment available for exposures to HIV that can help reduce the risk. This is known as PEP, discussed below.

PEP

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is a course of medicine taken after a high-risk exposure to HIV to reduce the risk of HIV transmission. A health professional will assess the risk to determine whether PEP is needed. It is not given routinely because it can cause side-effects, and needs to be taken consistently for one month. PEP should be started within 72 hours of the exposure, but preferably as soon as possible.

There is a 24-hour Victorian PEP info line 1800 889 887 or www.getpep.info

DIGNITY AND RESPECT – AVOIDING STIGMATISING TREATMENT

In the course of care, it is important to always treat others with dignity and respect. When we treat people poorly, whether accidental or on purpose, we stigmatise them, making it difficult or impossible for people to contribute to their own care. Stigma is serious form of shame, fear, or judgment associated with a particular characteristic a person might have. People living with HIV have often experienced significant stigma due to their status and discrimination due to their HIV status. By using standard precautions with every person in care, you can help reduce stigma, and contribute to a person's overall wellbeing.