



## **HIV/AIDS and the Food Industry**

**This leaflet contains information and advice on HIV the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, and AIDS the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It sets out the latest advice and explains a number of important issues relating to HIV and the Food Industry.**

**HIV and AIDS have attracted widespread publicity, and ill informed speculation has caused considerable alarm. Although a lot is now known about AIDS and the virus responsible for it, an effective cure has not yet been found. This leaflet seeks to complement the information already available from, for example, the Health Education Authority document "AIDS What Everybody Needs to Know", by giving advice appropriate to the Food Industry.**

### **WHAT IS AIDS?**

AIDS is a disease caused by a virus which attacks the body's natural defence system and leaves it vulnerable to various infections and cancers. Those who develop AIDS will eventually die from their illnesses. The disease is caused by the virus, which is called HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). Not all of those infected by this virus will necessarily develop the disease. Some may develop less serious illnesses which are not fatal, while some may have no symptoms at all and may even be unaware that they are infected.

### **HOW DOES INFECTION SPREAD?**

It has been found that the virus can only be transmitted through sexual contact with an infected person, through contaminated blood or blood products, sharing needles with an infected drug user, and from an infected

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mother to her baby during pregnancy or birth. Studies have shown that there is no risk of infection for members of an infected individual's family who have close, non sexual contact with them (for example, their children).

Normal work and social contact with an infected person is safe for both colleagues and the public. The HIV virus is not transmitted through the air and there is no evidence to suggest that it can be acquired as a result of sharing eating and drinking utensils, or washing and toilet facilities, with infected individuals.

### **IS THERE A RISK OF INFECTION AT WORK?**

There is no risk where there is no direct contact with the blood or semen of infected individuals. Very few jobs involve contact with these and the majority of employees are, therefore, safe from infection whilst at work. There are, however, some groups of workers who could come into contact with infected body fluids or materials and there is, therefore, the remote possibility of infection through a cut or accidental injection. Workers in the occupations where contacts with such body fluids and materials exist, already face the risk from other infections and many of the standard health and safety precautions in use are designed to be equally effective against such infections and will also protect against HIV.

### **AIDS AND FOOD**

There are no special rules associated with work in the food industry. AIDS is not spread by food or water and the normal rules of good hygiene apply to this situation, in the same way as it does to other infections. Accidental contamination of food by any extraneous matter, including human blood, should be routinely discarded. Cuts and abrasions should be covered with waterproof dressings.

## **CAN SOMEONE WHO IS INFECTED CONTINUE TO WORK IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?**

As with many other illnesses, someone who is infected should be able to work as normal whilst medically fit to do so. It is reported that most individuals who have been infected with the virus have continued to work, although those who have actually suffered from one or more of the related illnesses have not always been well enough to continue to work all the time. In all instances, appropriate medical advice should be sought. There is no requirement or need for people suffering from either infection with HIV or AIDS to notify their employer and when people become aware of such infections they must treat the information as CONFIDENTIAL.

It is not lawful to discriminate against job applicants on the grounds that they are HIV positive or are suffering from AIDS.

It is important to emphasise that people infected with the HIV virus are not a risk to others during normal work activities. In fact such people are more at risk of acquiring infections from their work mates, as their ability to fight infection is weakened by the virus.

## **ARE THERE ANY SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS REQUIRED?**

In any situation requiring first aid, certain precautions already need to be taken to reduce the risk of transmitting infections, including Hepatitis. The standard precautions will be equally effective against HIV. For example, first aiders should always cover any exposed cuts or abrasions they may have with a waterproof dressing before treating a casualty, whether or not any infection is suspected. First aiders should, whenever possible, routinely wash their hands both before and after applying dressings.

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HIV is killed by household bleach and the area in which any spills have occurred should be disinfected by using one part of household strength bleach diluted with ten parts of water. In areas where blood, semen or other body fluids have to be mopped up, disposable plastic gloves and an apron should always be worn and paper towels used. These items should then be placed in the correct type of plastic bag (yellow coloured) and safely disposed of by incineration. Contaminated clothing may be cleaned in an ordinary washing machine using its hot cycle. REMEMBER THAT BLEACH IS CORROSIVE AND CAN BE HARMFUL TO THE SKIN. INDUSTRIAL BLEACH IS MORE CONCENTRATED THAN HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS AND ADVICE ON DILUTION SHOULD BE SOUGHT BEFORE USE IF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCT ONLY IS AVAILABLE.

Mouth to mouth resuscitation should not be a cause of concern and should never be withheld in an emergency because infection is suspected.

General - The fear of becoming infected through social or work contact with persons with AIDS or individuals with HIV antibodies is not justified. There is no evidence that infection is transmitted by coughing, sneezing or spitting or by sharing cooking, eating or drinking utensils or other articles in general use or by sharing toilet facilities. Studies of families including people with HIV or AIDS have found that spread has been limited to sexual partners and to infants born of infected mothers. The risk even to health care personnel involved in the close care of AIDS patients is exceedingly low. There have been very few substantiated cases world wide of health care workers who have been infected as a result of an accident at work with an infected needle causing inoculation of blood. Several hundred other workers have had minor accidents with needles resulting in exposure to blood but none of them has become infected with HIV.