



# Don't get caught by infectious diseases



IGNORANCE.  
MAKES YOU SICK

SAFETY  
365

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365

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# PROTECT YOURSELF



## Frequently Asked Questions:

### Introduction

#### **Being safe is about much more than keeping a look-out for trains.**

Being safe on the tracks is also about the things you can't see.

Things that are just as deadly as a high-speed train.

Things like HIV, Hepatitis and Weil's Disease.

Some you'll have heard of, some you won't – either way they're out there, waiting to strike the unprepared.

This isn't scaremongering, it's plain fact. But the great thing is we can all follow simple safety steps to ensure we're fully protected.

I'm glad you've picked up this booklet. It'll go a long way to making sure you don't pick up anything nasty.

**Julian Lindfield**  
Director, Safety and Compliance  
September 2006

#### **How can you catch a disease?**

Diseases can be passed from one person to another by:

- Inhalation (breathing)
- Ingestion (swallowing)
- Injection (either through a needle or a sharps injury – see below)
- Absorption (e.g. through the skin, nose or eye)

The following body fluids can carry diseases:

- Blood
- Urine
- Faeces
- Vomit
- Semen
- Spit
- Secretions from the nose

NB Tears and sweat are not considered a risk.

#### **What's a sharps injury?**

A sharps injury is any injury which involves penetrating or breaking the skin by sharp objects (such as hypodermic needles, knives, broken glass or barbed wire) that could be contaminated with body fluids.

#### **How does Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) help?**

By making sure you wear the appropriate gloves, masks, goggles, waterproof clothing and footwear for the task you can reduce the chances of catching diseases.

**Read on for more details ...**

# IT'S YOUR CHOICE

## Hepatitis

Loss of appetite, diarrhoea, vomiting, flu-like symptoms, liver failure,

Death

## Lyme disease

Fever, headache, fatigue, skin rash and flu-like symptoms



## HIV and AIDS

Prevention is still the only cure

## Weil's disease

Headaches, severe calf and thigh pain, flu-like symptoms, loss of appetite, nausea when lying down, bruising of the skin, sore eyes, nose bleeds, jaundice,

Death

## Other diseases

- Tetanus
- Legionnaire's disease
- Infestations

Read on for more details...



# Hepatitis

**One name, three types of infection:**

## Hepatitis A

### What is it?

Hepatitis A is a viral infection that causes liver disease. The virus is found in the faeces of an infected person and spreads more easily where there is poor hygiene.

### What are the symptoms?

The classic symptoms include tiredness, muscle weakness, jaundice and gastrointestinal symptoms such as abdominal pain, loss of appetite, diarrhoea and vomiting. The severity of the disease typically increases with age.

### How is it caught?

At work the Hepatitis A virus is caught by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with Hepatitis A (oral- faecal route). For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where personal hygiene is not observed.

In addition to getting Hepatitis A directly from infected people, you can get Hepatitis A by:

- Swallowing contaminated water or ice
- Eating raw shellfish harvested from sewage-contaminated water
- Eating fruits, vegetables, or other food that may have become contaminated during handling

## Hepatitis B

### What is it?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection, which can cause anything from flu-like symptoms to acute liver failure and death. However, a person showing no symptoms may still carry the infection.

### How is it caught?

Hepatitis B is transmitted through:

- Contaminated blood, saliva, and body fluids contaminated with blood
- A sharps injury or through broken skin
- Splashes of blood (and other body fluids contaminated with blood) to eyes, nose and mouth
- Semen and vaginal fluid through unprotected sex

## Hepatitis C

### What is it?

Like Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C is a viral infection, which can cause anything from flu-like illness to acute liver failure and death.

### What are the symptoms?

Acute infection may result in mild or even no symptoms. If the disease progresses the most common complaint is tiredness.

### How is it caught?

Hepatitis C is transmitted through contact with:

- Blood and/or body fluids contaminated with blood
- A skin penetrating injury (such as a sharps injury) via broken skin
- Semen and vaginal fluid through unprotected sex, although this is rare

### How can you protect yourself from Hepatitis at work?

- Cover any cuts and grazes and wear the appropriate PPE
- Always wash your hands before and after going to the toilet and before smoking or eating food. If handwashing facilities are not available use an antibacterial handrub or wipes. If you do come into contact with bodily fluids, wash immediately with soap and water
- If you get bodily fluids (e.g. spit) in the eye, wash out immediately with cool water or saline solution
- If you are handling sharps use appropriate tools and PPE
- Always double bag biological waste in a yellow clinical waste bag
- If in doubt always seek medical advice

## VACCINATION?

You can help prevent Hepatitis by vaccination, **but vaccination doesn't guarantee safety:**

### Hepatitis A

There are two types of vaccinations available:

**Immunoglobulin**, which offers short-term protection against infection.

**Havrix**, which offers long-term protection. It should be used for adult frequent travellers, to areas where there are high or moderate epidemics of Hepatitis A or those staying more than three months in such areas.

### Hepatitis B

The vaccine currently in use for immunisation against infection caused by Hepatitis B consists of three doses of vaccine to be taken within six months.

The vaccinations should be followed by a blood test two to three months later.

### Hepatitis C

At present there is no vaccine available.

**Vaccination is no guarantee of total protection;** therefore, safe working practices are the primary means of protection.

**For more information please consult your local GP.**

# HIV & AIDS

**Sex isn't  
the only way  
to get HIV**

## What is it?

HIV is a virus that attacks and damages the body's defence system, stopping it from effectively fighting certain infections. It is less infectious than Hepatitis B, but it has no cure.

AIDS is not a single disease; it is a group of specific infections and cancers, which occur because the body's immune system has been compromised.

## How is it caught?

HIV is transmitted through contact with:

- **Blood**
- **Bodily fluids contaminated with blood**
- **Semen and vaginal fluids through unprotected sex**
- **Through a skin penetrating injury (such as a sharps injury)**
- **From mother to baby, across the placenta and by breast-feeding**

## How can you protect yourself?

Cover any cuts and grazes, wear the appropriate PPE and carry out safe working practices. If you do come into contact with bodily fluids, wash immediately with soap and water. If you get bodily fluids (e.g. spit) in the eye, wash out immediately with cool water or saline solution.

If you are handling sharps use appropriate tools and PPE. All biological waste should be doubled bagged in a yellow clinical waste bag.

**THERE IS NO  
VACCINATION  
FOR HIV**

# RATS

## Weil's disease (Leptospirosis)

RAT P\*\*S  
CAN BE  
A KILLER

### What is it?

Weil's disease is a **serious**, sometimes **fatal**, bacterial infection. It is transmitted to humans by contact with the infected urine of wild or domestic animals, most commonly rats.

### What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Muscular aches and pains
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea when lying down
- Bruising of the skin
- Sore eyes
- Nose bleeds
- Jaundice

### How is it caught?

You can catch Weil's disease if your mouth, eyes or broken skin (such as cuts or grazes) come in to contact with infected urine or contaminated water. You're most at risk if you are working near sewers, drains, ditches, ponds, lakes or slow-flowing rivers.

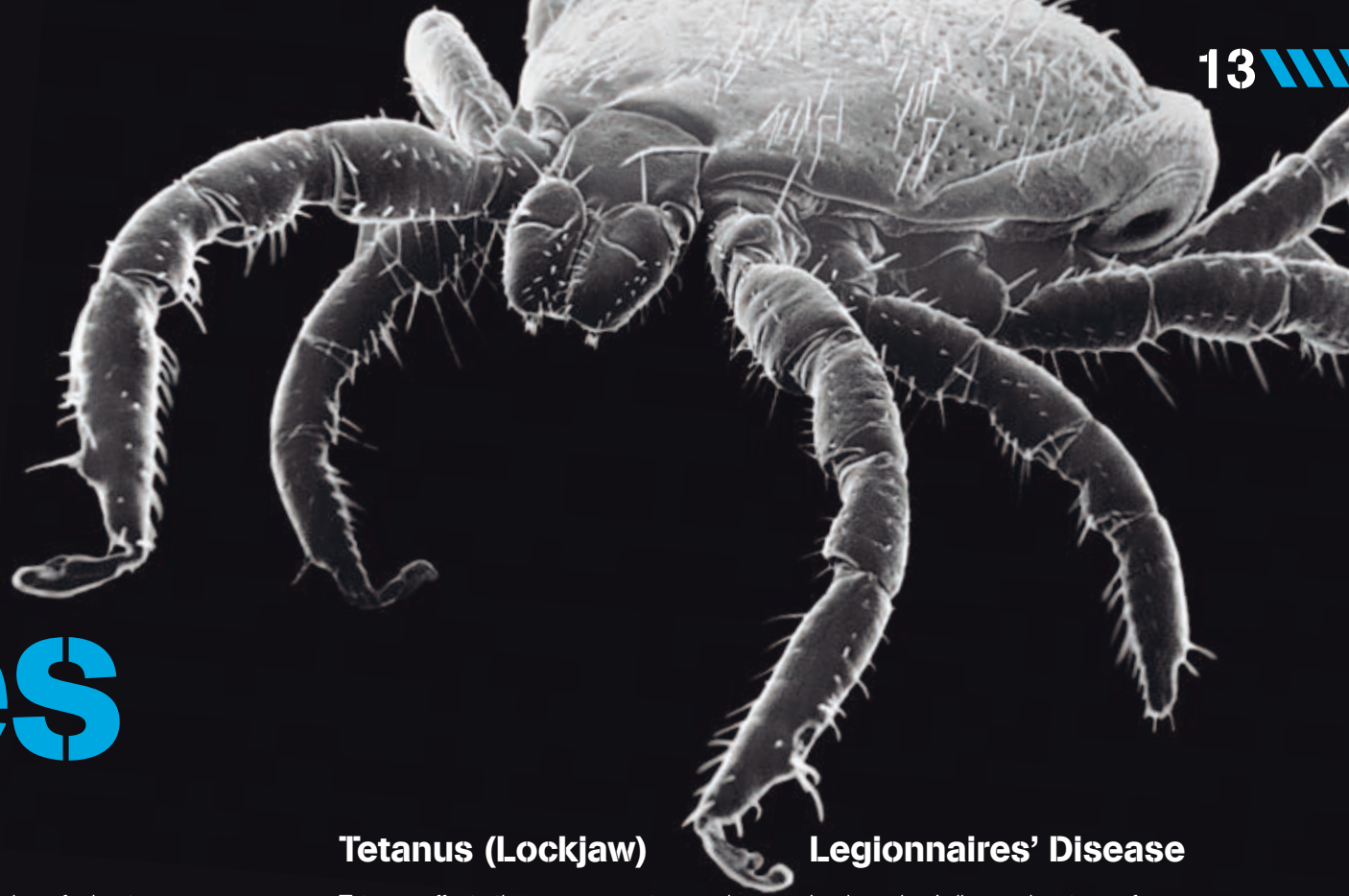
### How can you protect yourself?

Wear protective clothing and cover all cuts and broken skin with waterproof plasters. Always wash your hands before eating, drinking and smoking. If handwashing facilities are not available use antibacterial hand rubs or wipes.

Make sure you have a Weil's disease card issued by your line manager so that, in the event of experiencing any of the symptoms, you can show it to medical staff.



# Other diseases



## Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection transmitted from animal to man by the bite of a tick. A mild skin rash around the infected bite can be followed by flu-like symptoms. The disease is easily treated.

### How is it caught?

The ticks are found in forests, woodland, moorland and heath and are active in spring and autumn.

### How can you protect yourself?

Ensure you **always** wear the correct PPE and ensure it is kept clean.

### Treatment

Get advice from your pharmacist or GP. Members of your family may need to be treated too.

## Infestations

Infestations involve the invasion of a host (the human body) by animal parasites, which feed on the host's blood. Parasites, which infect human hair or skin, include lice, scabies, fleas and bed bugs.

### How is it caught?

Spread by direct contact with an infected person, their infected linen, clothing, brushes or combs.

### How can you protect yourself?

Ensure you **always** wear the correct PPE and ensure it is kept clean.

### Treatment

Get advice from your pharmacist or GP. Members of your family may need to be treated too.

## Tetanus (Lockjaw)

Tetanus affects the nervous system and causes severe spasms. It is often fatal.

### How is it caught?

Transmission occurs when there is contact between contaminated soil or manure and a cut, graze or area of broken skin.

### How can you protect yourself?

Always cover cuts and grazes with a waterproof plaster. Make sure that you are vaccinated against tetanus and that it is up-to-date.

## Legionnaires' Disease

Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia and is more common in summer. It is serious and sometimes fatal. Symptoms include high fever, chills, headache and muscle pain. Some sufferers experience vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain.

### How is it caught?

Legionnaires' disease is **not** transmitted from person to person. It appears to be transmitted in infected water droplets often originating from infected air conditioning towers and from undisturbed water in systems and showerheads.

A hand with the index finger pointing towards a sign. The sign is rectangular with rounded corners, a thick black border, and a white background with black, distressed-style text. The text reads "WHAT YOU CAN DO TO BEAT DISEASE".

# WHAT YOU CAN DO TO BEAT DISEASE

A yellow, textured work glove is shown in the bottom left corner of the page.

**It's basically  
common  
sense...**

**Good hygiene and the use of best safety practices can remove or significantly reduce the risk of infection.**

- Make sure you understand the health hazards you might face at work
- Keep your hands clean and wash (or use an antibacterial wipe) before eating, drinking or smoking
- Cover cuts with a waterproof dressing
- Use appropriate PPE and keep it clean
- Take extra care when handling sharps and dispose of them correctly
- Dispose of biological waste correctly
- Keep tools and equipment clean
- Report accidents, incidents and safety concerns

**Always work safely and don't take risks with your health.**

**Remember to tell your doctor the conditions that you work in if you have any of the symptoms described in this booklet.**





# Now wash your hands!

**Your skin is a natural barrier to infection, so when it's broken (by a cut, graze or even skin disease) bacteria and viruses can enter the body. You should always clean and dress any cut, scratch or abrasion with a waterproof dressing as soon as possible, wherever the injury has happened.**

## **Wash your hands**

This is the single most important thing you can do to reduce the spread of disease. Whenever your hands are visibly dirty, wash them thoroughly with soap and water then dry them completely. Alcohol hand gels and rubs are useful, but whenever possible use soap and water.

In particular, wash your hands:

- Before and after using the toilet
- Before eating, drinking or **smoking**
- After handling animals
- After physical contact with other people and/or body fluids

Wash thoroughly any skin that has been in contact with water from sewers, rivers drains, ponds or animals.

Scrub your nails, but do not break the skin.

Try to avoid rubbing your nose, mouth or eyes with your hands during work.

## **Hand protection**

Wear gloves whenever you might have contact with blood or body fluids, but remember they are not a substitute for hand washing. Put them on immediately before contact; take them off and throw them away as soon as the job is completed. When removing disposable gloves, peel them off from the wrist down to the fingers (effectively turning them inside out). This contains any contamination. Do not allow them to 'snap' off. Always wash your hands immediately afterwards.

If you are sensitive to natural rubber latex, then neoprene and nitrile gloves are a good alternative.

You must wear gloves that are the right length, size and suitable in material for the task in hand.

Where there is a risk of skin being cut, grazed or punctured, leather or Kevlar gloves should be worn. Wear disposable gloves under the leather gloves if there is also a risk of contamination with body fluid.

## **Cleaning up**

Cleaning of minor spillages of blood or body fluids should be undertaken using a disinfectant. A dilute solution of one part bleach to five parts water is an effective disinfectant against the Hepatitis (and HIV) virus and most bacteria.

Always use PPE when dealing with contaminated items during cleaning procedures.

Do not mix chemical disinfectants with each other or with detergents, as this may inactivate their disinfecting properties and/or create noxious fumes.

Any items of PPE or materials which are contaminated with biological waste e.g. gloves, should be disposed of in a yellow clinical waste bag, sealed with a label 'Danger, biological hazard', and displaying the international biohazard symbol. These bags should be kept secure until removal by a licenced contractor.

## **Vulnerable groups**

You may be at greater risk of infection if you have a health condition such as a chronic skin condition, reduced immune levels or if you are pregnant. If you think this applies to you, speak to your line manager.

## **Immunisation**

There are immunisation programmes available from your GP for many types of infection, such as Hepatitis B, Tetanus, Polio, Tuberculosis and Rubella. For more information contact your local healthcare centre or GP.

## Managing sharps injuries

Accidents can occur at any time. To reduce the risk of injury and exposure to blood-borne viruses such as Hepatitis B and C and HIV, sharps must be handled safely and disposed of carefully, following agreed policies and safe working procedures.

### **For example:**

- Handle sharps as little as possible, always use appropriate tools such as tongs
- Do not dismantle syringes and needles by hand before disposal

Local arrangements will have been made for the disposal of waste in your workplace. Make sure a licensed contractor is used to dispose of special waste and clear major spillages; these can usually be called out via Operations Control in an emergency.

## First aid treatment for sharps injuries

- Encourage the puncture injury to bleed
- Wash well under cool running water with soap and cover with a dry (sterile) dressing
- Medical advice should be sought as soon as possible, within 48 hours at the nearest local Accident & Emergency department

## Reporting accidents

Remember that any accident must be reported through the normal company procedure.

For further information please  
contact your line manager