

## Precautions to Prevent the Spread of Infection

This section of the module presents a set of guidelines that all WIC staff should follow to protect themselves and participants from infections while working in the WIC clinic. People are wonderful, but unfortunately they also carry viruses and bacteria that can make a person sick. Even small infants and people who look healthy can carry viruses and bacteria. In fact, all people carry viruses and bacteria in their bodies. Many of these viruses and bacteria can make another person sick if they are transferred in the right way. **Stay healthy. Keep WIC participants healthy.** This section of the manual gives information on how to prevent the spread of disease from one person to another. This information is important in the WIC clinic and in your personal life outside of the WIC clinic.

There are four ways that germs (bacteria and viruses) can be spread:

The spread of germs:

1. Airborne
2. Direct Contact
3. Fecal-oral Route
4. Blood Contact

1. **Airborne.** This happens when people sneeze or cough. They may sneeze directly on you or they may sneeze into their hands and then touch doorknobs, railings, papers, pens, or pencils. When you touch these objects you get the germs. Wash your hands often to protect yourself. Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze and then wash your hands. As much as possible avoid people who are coughing and sneezing, especially if they are close by and/or do not cover their mouths.
2. **Direct Contact.** Direct contact between two people can sometimes result in transmission of disease. Body lice can be transmitted from one child to another by direct contact. Certain skin diseases can be spread by direct contact. Open wounds and infections can spread germs through direct contact. If someone has an infection in their eye they can transmit it to you by rubbing their eye and then shaking hands with you. When you rub your eye you then get their germs and their infection in your eye. Again, wash your hand often. Avoid contact with open wounds or infections of another person.

AIDS and hepatitis are two very serious diseases that can be spread by contact with another person's blood. Because we do not know which WIC participants have the viruses that cause these diseases (and often WIC participants are unaware themselves that they are infected with these viruses) the blood from **ALL** participants must be handled carefully to prevent infection. There is no way to tell by looking at a person if they have the AIDS or hepatitis viruses in their blood.

3. **Fecal-oral Route.** This sounds really disgusting, but it happens more than you may think. It can be a problem in a WIC clinic. Kids with dirty diapers provide plenty of fecal material. Also anyone who uses the restroom without washing their hands may provide fecal material. The amount of fecal material may be very small, so small you cannot even see it. It may be on a toy, a doorknob, the measuring board, etc. If you touch any of these and then eat your lunch without washing your hands, you will get the fecal germs. Protect yourself by simply washing your hands.

4. **Blood Contact.** ANY body fluid, but especially blood, can transmit infection from one person to another. Some of these infections can be pretty serious, so pay attention. If you follow some simple precautions you will keep yourself from being at risk and you will not put participants at risk. Do not touch fluids that come out of the human body, especially blood and feces. In WIC we perform hematocrit/hemoglobin tests and we work with infants and children (who have dirty diapers or are in contact with other children with dirty diapers), so there is potential for you to contact another person's body fluids. Do not touch body fluids. Wear gloves when needed. If you do come in contact with another person's body fluids wash your hands or other place on your body where you came into contact with the fluid!!

Here are some ways to protect yourself from diseases spread by feces, blood, and other body fluids:

1. Whenever you may come in contact with body fluids, wear gloves. This includes when you are taking blood or cleaning up a mess that might include body fluids. This also includes when changing a child's diaper, cleaning up feces, urine, and/or vomit. If possible wash your hands

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**Wash Your Hands  
Frequently!**

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The HIV virus which causes AIDS is transmitted by certain body fluids and cannot be transmitted by casual contact such as shaking hands or hugging.

Body fluids which can spread AIDS:

- blood
- semen
- breast milk
- vaginal secretions

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when you remove the gloves. When you are performing a hematocrit continue to wear your gloves or get a new pair as long as you are handling any equipment that may be contaminated with blood (such as removing hematocrit tubes from the centrifuge). Do not wear the gloves you use to collect blood to operate your computer. If your gloves are contaminated you will contaminate your computer for later when you are not wearing gloves. Germs are very small. You cannot see them. Gloves need to be discarded after use and between participants. Do not carry germs from one participant to another.

2. Wash your hands. Wash your hands. Wash your hands—especially after handling infants and children—wash your hands.
3. If an accident does occur where blood or feces gets on equipment or the counter top clean those surfaces with a disinfecting solution. This can happen when parents change their children’s diapers during height and weight measurements. Wash the counter with disinfectant and wash your hands.
4. Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose. Keep your hands out of your face and hair. Do not bite or chew your nails. Do not place objects such as pens and pencils in your mouth. They are not clean and may be contaminated.
5. All materials that are saturated with blood or body fluids need to be disposed of in a special way. For example, cotton used to clean up excess blood off a participant’s finger should be disposed of in a special biohazard container or bag. NEVER touch the blood-soaked cotton with your bare hands. Remember, to wear gloves and wash your hands afterwards. Do not throw blood-soaked materials into the normal garbage unless all garbage in your clinic is treated as biohazardous waste.

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6. Wash your hands. Wash your hands. Wash your hands. Wash your hands when you go on a break, before and after lunch, after you use the bathroom, and before you go home.
7. Regularly clean surfaces where infants and children are placed. Use a disinfectant. Wear gloves when disinfecting and wash your hands when done. If your clothes get splashed or soaked with blood or body fluids from another person, remove the clothes, wash the area of contact on your body, and report the incident to your supervisor. Your supervisor will give you instructions on how to handle the situation and on how to properly clean your clothes.
8. Wash your hands. Are you starting to see a trend here? Washing your hands is one of the single most important measures you can take to keep yourself from getting sick – at work or at home.
9. Sharp objects—the lancets used for pricking a participant’s finger or the glass capillary tube used to measure a person’s hematocrit—need to be disposed of in a special sharps container that is labeled as a biohazard. These containers are designed to prevent the lancet or capillary tubes from accidentally puncturing anyone while disposing of these items. Some of the most serious types of infections occur when blood from one person (as on a used lancet) is injected into another person (as when the lancet somehow pricks someone else’s finger during disposal). NEVER, NEVER, NEVER use the same lancet on more than one person, even when one person is the mother and the other is a child. If your clinic uses a multi-use lancet device always change the needle and the “stage” before using it on another person. Make sure the lancet housing is clean between participants.

In the extremely rare event that someone, including yourself, gets stuck with a used lancet or capillary tube wash the area immediately with lots of soapy water and notify your supervisor IMMEDIATELY. There are types of medical treatment that can help prevent infection under these conditions.

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If you ever stick yourself (or anyone else) with a used autolet, capillary tube, or other sharp object notify your supervisor IMMEDIATELY. In the extremely rare event that blood is splattered on your skin or an open cut/wound, notify your supervisor IMMEDIATELY. Clinics must have procedures in place to report, assess, and provide treatment when these types of accidents occur.

**Handwashing:** Handwashing is one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of disease. Remember germs are very small critters that you cannot see. When you touch door knobs, toys, pens, and pencils you may pick up germs from someone who has touched them before you. This is especially true when working around children. Their hands end up touching all kinds of interesting things that can then transmit germs to you. If it is possible, wash your hands between participants.

When washing your hands:

Use soap. Liquid soaps are better than bar soaps. Bar soaps can carry germs from one person to another. Wash your hands under warm running water. Rub your hands together for at least 30 seconds while washing them. Wash your whole hand including top, bottom, between fingers, and under nails. Rinse hands well and let water run off finger tips. Dry hands with a clean paper towel and then use the paper towel to turn off the faucet (remember that you turned on the faucet with your dirty hands!). Cloth towels should not be used to dry your hands if you intend to reuse them even once. Throw paper towels away after use. You should always wash your hands after using the restroom, before and after eating, after handling any body fluids, changing a child's diaper, disinfecting equipment, when you arrive at the clinic in the morning and before you go home and, if possible, between each participant with whom you have close contact (as in weights and lengths for infants).

## #11 Practice!



1. The single most important action you can take to prevent the spread of infection is\_\_\_\_\_.
2. What are the four ways that germs can be spread?
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
  - D.
3. Used lancets can be disposed of in any biohazard garbage container.
  - A. True
  - B. False
4. After taking blood it is important to keep your gloves on until you have read the tubes to determine the hematocrit.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. When is it acceptable to reuse an autolet to get blood from more than one person?
6. What should you do if you accidentally stick yourself with a used autolet or capillary tube?