



MEDIA RELEASE

Avoiding infection from blood-borne viruses

New resource: Prehospital care workers and blood-borne viruses

The Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM) has developed this eight-page publication for Australian Prehospital Care Workers. It contains information about the three major blood-borne viruses (BBV) Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C (HCV) and the standard precautions that are required to reduce the incidence of becoming infected while providing a duty of care in all emergency situations.

Currently it is estimated that between 90,000 and 160,000 Australians are chronically infected with HBV, HCV is estimated at 202,400 with over 12,000 new infections annually, and HIV was just over 26,000 diagnoses at the end of 2006.

Health Care Workers, including ambulance and first aid providers, play pivotal roles in providing emergency care to people prior to hospitalisation. Given the high number of BBV infections in the population, health care workers may regularly come into contact with individuals infected with any one of these viruses whilst providing care. Controlling the spread of infection should be a critical concern for healthcare workers and clients. Measures designed to combat the spread of HBV, HCV, HIV and other infectious diseases range from following proper hand washing hygiene to coordinated policies involving worker health screening, immunisation, and treatment. All these measures should be incorporated into coordinated, organisation-wide infection control programs.

This new resource provides pre-hospital care workers with an overview on the three major blood-borne viruses and includes details on transmission, treatment and infection control practices.

The aims are to:

- Ensure that health professionals understand how blood-borne viruses can be transmitted in the work environment
- Apply current infection control principles as appropriate for the specific emergency environment
- Increase awareness about the immunisation program for HBV and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and non-occupational post exposure prophylaxis (NPEP) and availability.

The resource highlights that the blood and body fluids of all patients should be considered potentially infectious. Standard precautions significantly minimise the risk of BBV transmission and should be applied in the care and treatment of all patients, irrespective of their perceived or actual infectious status.

The *Prehospital Care Workers and Blood-borne Viruses* booklet is available free of charge from the ASHM office or may be downloaded from the following the link: www.ashm.org.au/prehospital



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Australasian Society for HIV Medicine Inc

About ASHM

- ASHM is the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine
- ASHM is the peak Australasian organisation representing the medical and health sector in HIV/AIDS and related areas.
- ASHM is a key partner in the Australian response to HIV, hepatitis and related diseases. It works closely with government, advisory bodies, community agencies and other professional organisations.
- ASHM conducts a broad Education Program in HIV and viral hepatitis for medical practitioners, health care providers and allied health workers and manages a program of continuing medical education in HIV and viral hepatitis.

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