

## Welcome to the Health and Community Services Module

Have you read the General Module, completed the test and printed your WorkSafe Smart Move General certificate?

The Health and Community Services Module should be done AFTER the General Module.

If it is some time since you have done the General Module, you should read the Review Module. The test for this module contains some questions based on the Review Module.

There are common hazards that exist in the health and community services industry. It is important to learn about these hazards and how to work safely.

The Health and Community Services Module contains information on:

- Manual Handling;
- Transmission of Disease;
- HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and C;
- Hazardous Substances;
- Work Related Stress; and
- Violence at Work.

Within the health and community services industry you may be involved in a range of work activities such as child care, safety and first aid for children, caring for the sick and elderly and people with disabilities and special needs, cleaning and clerical tasks.

Your employer must make sure your safety and health is not harmed in any way.

It is important that you work safely and follow work procedures, not only for your own safety, but also the safety of others.

## Manual Handling

Writing, typing, moving and placing boxes and other items on shelves; and lifting, moving and carrying children and patients are just some examples of manual handling tasks you may have to do in the health and community services industry.



**Key Point** People who suffer from a manual handling injury at work can spend the rest of their lives coping with pain and be unable to do a lot of things other people can do.

Many manual handling injuries in the health and community services, back injuries in particular, occur as a result of lifting sick or elderly people.

To reduce the risk of manual handling injury your employer should:

- provide safe work procedures, instruction, training and supervision for manual handling work activities;
- provide mechanical lifting equipment like trolleys and hoists;
- make sure employees do not work long shifts;
- re-organising work tasks to reduce the manual handling involved; and
- ensure the workplace layout allows employees enough space to move and work safely.

## Manual Handling

You should follow manual handling procedures, which may include:

- reducing the need to stoop by not putting items on the floor that will have to be picked up later (this is double handling);
- lightening loads;
- reducing bending twisting, reaching movements;
- using team lifting;
- using mechanical lifting equipment (e.g. trolleys and hoists to lift people);and
- wearing appropriate footwear (e.g. shoes with non-slip soles and good grip).

**Key Point** Even though you may be young and new to the job, as a young employee you should speak up if you feel your job is too heavy, too difficult, too tiring or puts you at risk of injury.

### Slippery Floors

Slippery and uneven floors in the community services industry workplace can be a serious hazard.

To reduce the hazard of slippery floors your employer should:

- make sure the floors are even, slip resistant and free from obstruction;
- make sure spills are cleaned immediately;
- make sure appropriate procedures are in place to clean floors and maintain non-slip floor properties;
- provide non-slip mats in problem areas such as the entrance to a shower room; and
- install a small ramp to avoid a step between different floor heights in doorways or shower cubicles.

A case study *Caring for the Aged* (Significant Incident Summary 2/1997) is on WorkSafe's website at [www.docep.wa.gov.au](http://www.docep.wa.gov.au)

## Transmission of Disease

Within the health and community services industry, the transmission of disease can be a hazard. It is important that you take the necessary steps to ensure your own safety and the safety of others both in the workplace and the wider community.

Employees who have direct contact with infectious people and/or faecal material or blood and body fluids are at increased risk. This includes child care employees, nurses, health care employees in hospitals and community facilities for people with disabilities and special needs, laboratory employees who process biological specimens, sewerage employees and plumbers. Employees working in areas where infectious diseases are more likely to be present, such as where hygiene and sanitation facilities are poor, may be at a greater risk.

Employees in the health and community services industry often care for people with infectious diseases and may have direct contact with blood and body fluids. Therefore, cleanliness and hygiene are very important to prevent the risk of disease and infection spreading to employees and others.

### Cleanliness and hygiene

Your employer must make sure you are trained in safe work procedures for cleaning and disinfecting. As a general rule you should clean areas thoroughly with water and detergent using a disposable cloth. After all visible soiling has been removed follow workplace procedures, and where appropriate, wipe over surfaces with a clean, disposable cloth saturated with hypochlorite 0.5% and allow to dry.

## Transmission of Disease

In the event of being exposed to blood or body fluids from a needle stick injury or a splash onto a mucous membrane, you should take the following action:

- promptly wash away the blood or body fluid;
- encourage bleeding if there is a wound, and wash thoroughly again;
- use soap except for your eyes and mouth which should be rinsed thoroughly with water; and
- report the incident to the appropriate authority.

Counselling may be offered to you in the event of an incident and you may be advised to be tested for infection.

You should place linen soiled with blood or body fluids or excreta in a separate bag marked for “foul” linen and then put into the usual linen bag. The hot washing method used for “foul” linen destroys infectious diseases in the linen.

### Standard Precautions

Standard precautions are work practices that should be used at all times to reduce the risk of infection from blood and body fluids. Standard precautions are basically treating all blood and body fluids as if it is infectious. This includes using good hygiene practices, using protective barriers such as gloves and appropriately handling and disposing of sharps and other contaminated or infectious waste.

For transmission of blood born diseases to occur, the blood or body fluid of an infected person must enter the body through broken skin or mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth. By using standard precautions and being aware of the condition of the skin (eg. any cuts) will reduce the risk of infection.

# Transmission of Disease

## Practical hygiene steps

To ensure your safety and the safety of others your employer should make sure you are trained to follow practical hygiene steps such as the following:

- wash your hands between contact with patients or residents and before eating or drinking;
- wear gloves when dealing with blood or body fluids as gloves greatly reduce the risk of your hands being contaminated with infected blood or body fluids;
- wash your hands immediately after removing gloves;
- discard gloves contaminated with blood or body fluids after treating each patient and put on a new pair – wearing gloves does not prevent cross-infection;
- when clothing is likely to be soiled with blood or any body fluid wear waterproof aprons and gowns;
- wear a mask and protective eye wear in situations where your eyes, nose or mouth are likely to be exposed to splashed or sprayed blood or body fluid, e.g. dental and surgical procedures and cleaning soiled equipment; and
- cover cuts or abrasions on exposed parts of the body with waterproof dressings at all times while on duty.

**Key Point** Your employer should provide suitable personal protective equipment and clothing, such as gloves, face masks, safety glasses, aprons and gowns and train you how to correctly store and use it.

## HIV/Aids, Hepatitis B and C

The *Health Act* requires all cases of scheduled infectious diseases to be reported to the Health Department of WA. This includes HIV infection, Lymphadenopathy Syndrome, asymptomatic infection, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.

The Health Department is responsible for initiating the control procedures for infectious diseases. Policies on HIV/AIDS infection are developed by the WA Task Force, on which WorkSafe is represented.

Employees who have a positive test for AIDS antibodies and are healthy do not need to be excluded from their normal duties, with two exceptions. As with others suffering from an infectious disease, they should not participate in training for the administration of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and they should not care for patients who have any disease that affects the immune system, due to the risk of transmitting infections to these patients.

Your employer should make sure Hepatitis B and C or HIV/AIDS positive employees follow some general precautions to prevent the transmission of the disease. This includes:

- not donating blood;
- covering any cuts or abrasions with a waterproof dressing;
- wearing gloves when dealing with patients if skin is broken;
- washing hands thoroughly after contact with their own blood or body fluids;
- not sharing personal items such as razors and toothbrushes; and
- having regular follow-up medical assessments (in the case of HIV/AIDS).

## HIV/Aids, Hepatitis B and C

There is no likelihood of catching HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis B or C from casual contact at work. As Hepatitis B and C and HIV/AIDS are blood born diseases, it is not necessary for the employer to be informed that the employee is infected, unless warranted by their particular situation, such as doctors and dentists where the risk of infection is increased due to contact with body fluids. Open communication, understanding, support and assistance are needed.

## Hazardous Substances

In the health and community services you may use and handle hazardous substances such as cleaning products, detergents, disinfectants, medical supplies and medical waste.

Chemicals and hazardous substances in the workplace need not be dangerous if used safely. Awareness of possible risks, even from ordinary substances, can help prevent sickness, discomfort and injury.

It is important that your supervisor makes sure you use hazardous substances according to the manufacturers or supplier's written instructions (the Material Data Safety Sheet or MSDS) and the agreed safe work procedures for your workplace. If you need more information on the substances that you are using, ask your supervisor or safety and health representative.

To reduce the risk your employer can sometimes substitute a non hazardous cleaning product. You may need to wear gloves when handling and using some chemical cleaning products. Your employer should provide protective gloves.



# Hazardous Substances

## Medical waste

Your employer should make sure medical waste is handled safely. Safe work procedures include the following:

- medical waste should be stored in a weather-proof, secure location, isolated from other wastes and in a safe manner so that it does not pose a hazard to people or the environment;
- sharps (i.e. objects or devices having sharp points capable of cutting or piercing the skin) should be placed in a suitable container that is puncture resistant, leak-proof, clearly coloured, labelled and capable of being sealed when full and it should also carry the biohazard symbol recognised worldwide and adopted for use in Australia;
- medical waste should be stored in a clean, leak-proof, clearly labelled container suitable for transport to a disposal site;
- biological specimens should be incinerated;
- people responsible for collecting medical waste should be authorised by the Health Department;
- pharmaceutical products should be disposed of as for medical waste; and
- reusable containers should be thoroughly cleaned prior to use.



## Work Related Stress

Stress is often part of work in the health and community services industry because employees may often deal with sick, elderly, and injured people on a daily basis.

**Examples of stressful work you may have to do include jobs that involve:**

- dealing with violent and aggressive behaviour or the threat of it occurring;
- dealing with injury, disease and death; and
- having continuous contact with people and human suffering.

Occupational stress is people's natural reaction to being put under intense pressure at work over a period of time. It is reasonable for your employer to assume that you are mentally capable of withstanding reasonable pressure from normal work demands.

However, the circumstances at the time may mean you are more at risk of becoming stressed. Stress can be started or made worse by work arrangements, deadlines and demands set without consultation, conflict, bullying and harassment. Personal problems at home or a death or sickness in the family will also influence the way you cope with stress at work.

Stress is not a disease or injury but it may cause your work performance to drop and your health to decline. The effects of stress can be both physical and behavioural. Generally these effects last only briefly and have little or no long term effects.

## Work Related Stress

**Physical effects** may include increased heart rate, headache, blurred vision, perspiration, dizziness, aching neck and shoulder muscles, clenched jaw and skin rashes.

**Behavioural effects** sometimes include increased anxiety and irritability. “flying off the handle” easily, excess alcohol and other drug taking, poor sleeping and poor concentration and nervous breakdown.

Not all pressure is harmful. People are often kept motivated by the challenges and difficulties we meet and are able to solve at work. However, the ability to deal with pressures is not limitless.

There will always be times at work when you feel more stressed. Talking to others about your concerns often eases the pressure. Keeping fit and relaxed will help you deal with a crisis better.

### Preventing Stress

#### To reduce or remove unnecessary stress, employers can:

- provide a consistent approach to management;
- encourage supervisors and employees to talk about any problems or concerns;
- provide well-defined tasks with clear responsibilities;
- provide relief if the job is very monotonous or boring;
- set challenging but achievable targets;
- use flexible work schedules that are planned and agreed;
- make sure that people are treated fairly and without bullying or harassment; and
- provide positive feedback when appropriate.

## Violence at Work

In the health and community services industry you may be at risk of injury or harm from violent acts. You may have to work with patients who are confused or unwell and who may be prone to violent outbursts or aggressive acts.

Non- physical violence such as verbal abuse, intimidation and threatening behaviour may cause you to feel stressed.

Your employer should take steps to protect you from violence at work. Talk to your supervisor if you feel threatened or are unsure how to deal with violent persons at work.

**Now try the self-assessment questions on the Internet at [www.docep.wa.gov.au](http://www.docep.wa.gov.au)**

BEFORE you start the questions, it is important to type your name on the computer screen exactly as you want it to appear on your certificate.

There are 16 questions and if you get 12 or more correct you can print online a WorkSafe Smart Move Certificate signed by the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection.