

Toolbox Safety Talks

Infection control

SafeWork SA
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Talk about safety at work

Take ten minutes at 10am, or at any other time of the day, to talk with your team about workplace safety. This training resource is designed to help you deliver short presentations covering a series of work health and safety topics.

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Here is an example of an infection control incident.

A 17-year old fast food worker was loading a rubbish bag into a skip bin when he was pricked in the left forearm by a used syringe needle in the bag.

It took three months for test results to confirm that the teenager had not contracted a disease as a result of the incident. The company was fined \$10,000 and ordered to pay costs of \$20,000.

ASK THE QUESTION

What factors contributed to the incident?

Possible answers:

- *no education on infectious diseases*
- *no procedure on how to deal with disposal of sharps*
- *no safe system of work*
- *no cover on dumpster to prevent unauthorised use*
- *no instruction to young worker.*

READ OUT

A workplace infectious disease is one that can be contracted through work, from many different sources.

Some diseases are carried by animals or people, while others are contracted from the environment. For example, people working with animals may be at risk of Q Fever, Leptospirosis and Anthrax.

Some of these diseases can produce long-term and life-threatening conditions such as damage to the lungs, liver, heart or immune system. The risk of contracting a disease and the potential harm are higher in some workers, such as pregnant women or immune-suppressed people.

As with all disease, prevention is better than cure.

Workplace health and safety is everyone's responsibility

A Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) has a duty of care under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)* to provide a safe workplace and systems of work, information, instruction, training and an opportunity for workers to consult about work health and safety.

In relation to infectious diseases this would include:

- knowing which diseases can be contracted in the workplace
- assessing the risk of these potential diseases being transmitted to workers.

The risk assessment should consider the following factors:

- how the disease(s) can be transmitted
- current work practices and control measures
- adequacy of current control measures.

If the risk assessment identifies any uncontrolled or inadequately controlled risks, PCBUs must implement control measures to eliminate or reduce the risk.

Examples of control measures for infectious diseases include:

- **education and training**
- **vaccination** for high-risk workers (where a suitable vaccine exists)
- **safe work methods**, commonly referred to as standard precautions – for example, frequent and thorough hand washing
- **eliminating or reducing worker exposure** to potentially infectious situations
- use of appropriate **personal protective equipment (PPE)**
- **engineering controls** like ventilation systems or biological safety cabinets.

The following control measures may be implemented where there is a risk of needle stick injury:

- **education and training** regarding infectious disease risk in the workplace
- **replace plastic bags with containers that can be secured** before handling, such as a plastic wheelie bin with a lid – care should be taken not to introduce another risk, like creating a manual handling risk by requiring the bins to be emptied by hand
- **develop work procedures** and train workers in the safe handling of rubbish
- **train workers** in the safe collection and disposal of syringes found outside refuse bags or bins
- **provide and maintain PPE** for situations where a risk of needle stick injury has been identified – for example, purchase commercially available PPE such as needle resistant gloves and clothing to minimise syringe penetration.

As workers, we have a responsibility to ensure our own health and safety and that of others affected by our work. We should be aware of our responsibilities and that the conscientious use of standard precautions will minimise the risk of acquiring and transferring infections between people.

Standard precautions include:

- **hand washing** after any contamination of hands
- **care of intact normal skin**
- **protection of damaged skin** by covering with a waterproof dressing or gloves
- **proper handling and disposal** of sharps
- **good hygiene practices** to prevent most infections
- **the use of PPE**
- **containment of all blood and body fluids** – for example, confining spills, splashes and contamination of the environment and workers to the smallest amount possible.

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Under work health and safety legislation, we also have an obligation to cooperate and help our PCBU comply with health and safety obligations. We may be required to notify incidents where we may expose (or have potentially exposed) a fellow worker or member of the public to certain diseases, such as HIV or Hepatitis B or C. Notification of such incidents is also subject to privacy and discrimination legislation.

ASK THE QUESTION

Before I finish, is there anything that we could be doing better in this workplace to help prevent workers contracting an infectious disease?

Take notes about suggestions ... don't panic if there aren't any takers!

READ OUT

OK, unless anyone has any questions, thanks for participating.