



Infection Prevention and Control - Patient management and healthcare worker exclusion periods Policy

1. Background

Infectious agents (also called pathogens) are biological agents that cause disease or illness to their hosts. Infectious diseases (also known as communicable diseases or transmissible diseases) are caused by infectious agents and can be passed from one person or animal to another. Many infectious agents are present in healthcare settings.

Infection includes six elements - causative agent (pathogen), reservoir, portal of exit, means of transmission, portal of entry, and a susceptible host. Patients and healthcare workers (HCWs) are most likely to be sources of infectious agents and are also the most common susceptible hosts. Other people visiting and working in healthcare may also be at risk of both infection and transmission.

- Patients may be exposed to infectious agents from themselves such as bacteria residing within the skin, in the respiratory or gastrointestinal tract (*endogenous infection*) or from other people, instruments and equipment, or the environment (*exogenous infection*). The level of risk relates to the healthcare setting (specifically, the presence or absence of infectious agents), the type of healthcare procedures performed, adherence to hand hygiene, immunisation status and the susceptibility of the patient.
- HCWs may be exposed to infectious agents from infected or colonised patients, instruments and equipment, or the environment. The level of risk relates to the type of clinical contact HCWs have with potentially infected or colonised patient groups, instruments or environments, adherence with standard and transmission-based precautions, and the health status of the healthcare worker (e.g. immunised or immunocompromised).

In healthcare settings, the main modes of transmission of infectious agents are contact (including blood borne), droplet and airborne. The modes of transmission vary by type of organism. In some cases, the same organism may be transmitted by more than one route (e.g. norovirus, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can be transmitted by contact and droplet routes).

Measures of protection for WACHS HCWs related to Infection Prevention and Control (IP&C) include:

- pre-employment health assessment (PEHA) screening and ongoing immunisation review and reporting systems
- Education on safe work practices that minimise the transmission of infection
- Safe work practices and workplaces that are designed to minimise the transmission of infection
- Physical protection, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

HCWs can become exposed to infectious agents in several ways, including through direct contact with an infectious patient, as a result of a sharps injury, or through eating or drinking contaminated sources of food / drinks. HCWs may also put patients at risk of infection if they come to work with a transmissible disease. HCWs are obligated to follow specific established IP&C policies as part of their contract or employment. Failure to follow policies and procedures may be grounds for disciplinary action.

2. Policy Statement

Protection for HCWs and consumers should be an integral part of the IP&C and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) programs of every health service. This includes implementing a PEHA / screening process, promoting immunisation for vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs), implementing additional protection measures for HCWs in specific circumstances (e.g. pregnant / immunocompromised HCWs) and having processes for minimising and managing risk exposure.

While the organisation has a duty of care to HCWs, employees also have a responsibility to protect themselves and to not put others at risk.

The purpose of this policy is to outline for WACHS Health Services the relevant IP&C guidelines for communicable diseases, incorporating patient management and HCW exclusion periods. WACHS Health Services include WACHS Hospitals, smaller Health centres, Nursing posts, Aboriginal Health, Population Health, Community Health, Mental Health and Aged Care services.

Refer to: [WACHS Infection Prevention and Control for Communicable Diseases - Patient management and HCW exclusion periods](#)

3. Definitions

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| Clinical Area | An area in which examination, investigations, intervention, care, management and/or treatment of patients or clients is undertaken in a WACHS Health Service. |
| Pre-employment health assessment (PEHA) | A framework that incorporates the assessment, screening and vaccination of healthcare workers to minimise the risk of transmission of vaccine preventable diseases. This must align with relevant state and territory policies and/or legislation. |
| Clinical HCW | The medical, nursing, mental health, allied health and support services workforce who provide patient care. |
| Healthcare Worker (HCW) | Any person employed or contracted by WACHS, either on a permanent, temporary, casual, volunteer or agency basis to deliver or support healthcare services. |
| Non-Clinical HCW | Includes all employees and volunteers who may enter patient areas, but do not provide care for patients. This may include those working in management, administration, education or research. |

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 (WA)* places a duty of care on employers to ensure workplace health and safety, including where occupational infectious disease hazards exist. WACHS should ensure all employees are informed of the WACHS policy on health screening. Counselling should be provided to any individuals whose ability to undertake work or complete study may be impacted due to transmissible infections.

HCWs and student's privacy and civil rights should always be respected and not breached.

All HCWs should take reasonable steps to be aware of their own past infectious disease and / or immune status to minimise the risk of transmitting infectious diseases to patients, colleagues or consumers. Immunisation against known vaccine preventable diseases, as relevant to the area or category of employment is strongly encouraged and mandated in some settings.

Any employee who has a suspected or confirmed communicable disease has a responsibility to consult an appropriate medical practitioner regarding their ability to perform their tasks without putting patients, other HCWs or themselves at risk and to undergo recommended medical follow-up and clinical management.

All Staff are required to work within policies and guidelines to make sure that WACHS is a safe, equitable and positive place to be.

HCW's with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C infections should refer to and comply with [Australian National Guidelines for the Management of Healthcare Workers Living with Blood Borne Viruses and Healthcare Workers who Perform Exposure Prone Procedures at Risk of Exposure to Blood Borne Viruses](#).

5. Compliance

This policy is a mandatory requirement to meet the National Safety and Quality Health Service Preventing and Controlling Healthcare Associated Infection Standard, Action 3.15 – Workforce screening and immunisation.

Failure to comply with this policy may constitute a breach of the WA Health Code of Conduct (Code). The Code is part of the [Integrity Policy Framework](#) issued pursuant to section 26 of the [Health Services Act 2016](#) (WA) and is binding on all WACHS staff which for this purpose includes trainees, students, volunteers, researchers, contractors for service (including all visiting health professionals and agency staff) and persons delivering training or education within WACHS.

WACHS staff are reminded that compliance with all policies is mandatory.

6. Records Management

Records Management for all WACHS HCW records must be managed in accordance with the [Records Management Policy](#).

7. Evaluation

Evaluation of this policy is to be carried out by the Infection Control Advisory Forum. The following means or tools are to be used:

- Review of the number of episodes of Healthcare associated transmission of communicable diseases
- Review of outbreaks of communicable diseases.

8. Standards

[National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards - 3.15](#)

9. Legislation

[National Health Security Act 2007](#)

[Public Health Act 2016 \(WA\)](#)

[Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 \(WA\)](#)

10. References

Australian Government, Department of Health, Series of National Guidelines (SoNGs) <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdnasongs.htm>.

[Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council \(2019\)](#)

[Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation \(ATAGI\). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health, Canberra, 2018, immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au](#)

Government of Western Australia, Child and Adolescent Health Service (2020) [Employee Health Infections](#).

Government of Western Australia, Department of Health [Communicable Disease Guidelines 2017 Edition](#)

11. Related Forms

Nil

12. Related Policy Documents

[WACHS Infection Prevention and Control Policy](#)
[WACHS Public Health Management of Mumps Outbreaks Guideline](#)

13. Related WA Health System Policies

NMHS [Guidelines for Tuberculosis Control in Western Australia](#) (September 2019)
MP 0120/19 [Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease Policy](#)
MP 0124/19 [Code of Conduct Policy](#)
MP 0132/20 [Staff Member Influenza Vaccination Policy](#)
MP 0133/20 [Identification and Use of Personal Protective Equipment in the Clinical Setting During the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic Policy](#)
MP 0153/21 [COVID 19 Mandatory Vaccination and Vaccination Program Policy](#)
[Health Care Worker Immunisation Policy](#)
[Infection Prevention and Control of Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci in Western Australian Healthcare Facilities Policy](#)
[Infection Prevention and Control of Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae \(CRE\) in Western Australian Healthcare Facilities](#)
[Infection Prevention and Control of Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus \(MRSA\)](#)

14. Policy Framework

[Public Health](#)

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