

Protecting Your School from Infectious Disease



Cold and flu, impetigo, ring worm, head lice, streptococcal sore throat, measles, AIDS/HIV and hepatitis B are all examples of infectious diseases that students and staff could be exposed to in the school setting. Infectious diseases can be passed from person to person through saliva and nasal discharges or through insects and animals. In the case of AIDS/HIV and hepatitis B, infection may occur through the spread of blood and bodily fluids containing the blood of an infected person (who may not be ill).

It is usually not possible to know who may be a carrier of infectious disease and what germs may be present. In many cases, carriers do not always demonstrate outward signs of infection and are often not aware of being infected. There are however, steps that may be taken to help protect staff and students from all infectious diseases.

The United States Centers for Disease Control have prepared a listing of “universal precautions” that can be utilized by educational institutions. Universal precautions simply mean, “taking routine care in handling blood and body fluids containing blood of all persons regardless of whether those persons are known to be infected with some specific disease-causing agent.” The principles of universal precautions in the school setting as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control include the following:

- Wash your hands with soap and running water frequently during the day. Many infectious diseases (excluding AIDS/HIV and hepatitis B) may be contracted from dirt and waste encountered at school.
- Avoid punctures with objects that may contain the blood of other persons.
- Handle blood and other bodily fluids that may contain blood with gloves and wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water when finished.
- Dispose of trash containing body wastes and sharp objects carefully. Use special containers lined with plastic for disposal of refuse that contains blood or any body spills that may contain blood. When disposing sharp objects, use containers that cannot be broken or penetrated. Do not bend, break or recap needles.
- Remove all other person’s blood or bodily wastes from skin promptly by washing with soap and running water.
- Surfaces containing blood or body wastes should be cleaned with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved disinfectant or a 1:10 solution of household bleach and water. Keep the solution fresh daily to ensure proper strength.

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- Review and know the Parish’s policy on the proper disposal of waste that is contaminated with body discharges.
- Have a vaccination for protection from hepatitis B if you are in contact with developmentally delayed students, or if you are classified as a potential for contact with blood or other bodily fluids. The cost of the vaccination, as stated in the Bloodborne Pathogen Standard 1910.1030(g)(2)(vii)(I) “will be offered free of charge.”
- If you are a first-aid responder, be sure to maintain current instruction and certification in first-aid and CPR. Current instruction includes modification of first-aid needed to protect the rescuer from infection.
- Maintain confidentiality of student and worker medical information, especially one who has AIDS/HIV infection. Sharing of this information without permission is prohibited by law and punishable by fine in some states.

Preparedness for infectious diseases is the key to keeping the occurrence of such diseases low. Educating each other and following the precautions outlined by the Centers for Disease Control will help to keep down the rate of illness occurrence in your school. Maintaining a healthy learning environment for both staff and students is everyone’s responsibility.

-Information excerpted from Infectious Diseases in the School Setting, Classroom Connections, Inc., Merced, CA.