



Infectious & Communicable Diseases

Information Sheet

Purpose

The purpose of this Information Sheet is to provide guidance to individuals and Schools/Branches on what steps to take when dealing with a communicable or infectious disease. This information sheet does not cover working with infectious material, for information on this please refer to the relevant risk assessment/Safe Operating Procedures, [Biological Safety Management](#) and [Australian Standard 2243 \(2010\) Safety in Laboratories Part 3: Microbiological Safety and Containment](#).

Q1 What is the definition of an infectious disease and communicable disease?

Infectious disease is an illness caused by the spread of prions or micro-organisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi or parasites) to humans, animals or the environment, including food and water.

Communicable Disease is a disease capable of being transmitted from an infected person or species to a susceptible host, either directly or indirectly.

Some infectious/communicable diseases are deemed to be notifiable conditions (a disease or medical condition, which present a serious threat to the community). Note in some of these cases the Department of Health (SA Health) will manage the University's response.

Q2 What if the School/Branch is informed that a person has an infectious or communicable disease?

- Depending on the type of disease and the apparent level of infectiousness, the individual should be either sent home or given duties in a somewhat isolated work environment, in order to restrict the spread of disease and provide for the safety of other staff in the work environment.
- The person is entitled to complete **confidentially** and a workplace/study environment **free from discrimination**.
- In almost all cases the person does not have to disclose their medical history (for more information please refer to Q3).
- For further advice please contact the local [Health Safety and Wellbeing \(HSW\) team](#).

Q3 What if I have an infectious and/or communicable disease?

Am I required to reveal my medical history?

Personnel with an infectious/communicable disease are expected to act responsibly by following the directions and advice of their medical practitioner, and not unduly endanger or expose workplace staff to contagions where possible.

However there is no obligation on any person to disclose their medical history except where:

- It is required to protect the public health, as in the case of Dental, Medical and Nursing students, to protect the health of patients who access University clinical facilities and teaching hospitals, or
- Applicants for Dental, Nursing and Medical School clinical programs are required to provide the Faculty of Health Sciences, or the relevant School, with written evidence of their status in relation to the Prescribed Communicable Infections for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.

What are my rights?

The University of Adelaide will ensure that people with an infectious or communicable disease are guaranteed the following protections:

- The right to confidentiality of all information relating to their health status, any medical tests carried out and aspects of their personal behaviour that may put them at risk;
- A study or work environment free from discrimination and harassment; and
- Access to clearly defined grievance processes.

The discrimination or harassment of persons with an infectious or communicable disease, or those assumed to have an infectious or communicable disease will not be tolerated (see the HSW Handbook chapter on [Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying and Harassment](#) and [Behaviour and Conduct Handbook](#), except where the disability is an infectious disease and the discrimination is reasonably necessary to protect public health - Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Section 48.

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Q3 What if I have an infectious and/or communicable disease? Cont.

Is there support?

The University provides free and confidential counselling services available to staff ([Employee Assistance Program](#)) and students ([Student Life Counselling Support](#)).

Q4 What if my School/Branch/area is notified by the Department of Health regarding a staff/student that has contracted an infectious disease and communicable disease i.e. a notifiable condition?

If the area receives this notification **they must immediately contact** the Director, HSW 0410 422 737 or Manager, HR/HSW Audit & Compliance 0404 489 059, who will handle the response on behalf of the University. Confidentiality must be maintained at all times.

Q5 What happens if a person in the University contracts an infectious disease and communicable disease i.e. notifiable condition?

Under the Public and Environmental Health Act 2011 medical practitioners must notify the Department of Health Department within three days of forming a suspicion that a patient has a listed notifiable condition.

If the condition is controlled, then the University will be informed by the Department of Health. If the School/Branch/area receives this notification **they must contact** the Director HSW 0410 422 737 or Manager, HR/HSW Audit & Compliance 0404 489 059, who will handle the response on behalf of the University. Confidentiality is to be maintained at all times.

On receiving notification the required response and actions recommended by the Department of Health will be put in place and, if required, co-ordinated by the University's Emergency Management Incident Management Task Group (IMTG) depending on the severity and resources needed. All members of the University community must follow the instructions given by the Department of Health and the IMTG.

The decision to share information is made on a case-by-case basis, with the Emergency Director making the final decision in consultation with the Health Department.

Q6 What happens in the situation of a pandemic?

The University's Emergency Management Incident Management Task Group will co-ordinate the response for the University under the direction of the Department of Health. The University of Adelaide has a Pandemic Action Plan and Working Party which monitors the global situation and possible impacts on the University of Adelaide, for more information please contact the Director HSW (0410 422 737) or Manager, HR Policy, Safety and Compliance (0404 489 059).

Q7 What do I do if my work involves exposure to an infectious and/or communicable disease?

As part of the risk assessment process of the work you undertaking you should identify any potential exposure and implement processes described in HSW Handbook under [Biological Safety Management](#).

Potential exposure could be through working with human research subjects and patients, working with animals, cleaning of equipment and media used to culture microorganisms and in disposal of biological waste.

Risk controls may include the requirement for vaccinations in some instances in addition to safe work practices and personal protective equipment.

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Q8 Where do I obtain further information on infectious and/or communicable disease?

HSW Handbook and other University Policies

- [Biological Safety Management](#)
- [Preventing and responding to workplace bullying and harassment](#)
- [Disability Action Plan](#)
- [Behaviour and Conduct Handbook](#)

Legislation and Australian Standards

- [South Australia Public Health Act 2011](#)
- [South Australian Public Health \(Notifiable and Controlled Notifiable Conditions\) Regulations 2012](#)
- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cwth\) – Section 48 - Infectious Diseases](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Act 2012 \(SA\)](#)
- [Blood-Borne Virus guidelines for health professionals](#)
- [AS/NZS 2243.3 \(2010\) Safety in laboratories – Microbiological aspects and containment facilities](#)

Websites

- Communicable Disease**
- Australian government – Department of Health – Communicable diseases information**
- <https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-communic-1>

Further information

Should you be unable to access any of the abovementioned standards or require further information, please contact the local [HSW Team](#).

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