

How to prevent the spread of diseases at work

Diseases that spread from one person to another are known as **communicable diseases**. A healthy person may catch the disease from another person.

What causes communicable diseases?

Very tiny organisms called germs are present everywhere in the air, water, and soil. When germs enter a healthy body through infected food, water, air, contact or insects, they multiply and produce the symptoms of the diseases.

Communicable diseases spread from one person to another through contact with an infected person, contact with infected surfaces, breathing in germs that are airborne, sexual contact, contact with animals or insects that are carrying diseases, or eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

Communicable diseases affect all workers in workplaces. Some infections can pose a risk to the unborn child if acquired by the mother during pregnancy such as chicken pox and rubella.

How can I be exposed to communicable diseases at work?

If you are a health care worker, you will be exposed to communicable diseases of patients while providing care to them. You can also be exposed if you have frequent contact with the public or work in a crowded workplace. Consider the numerous times you have come to work while sick. You are feeling sick, but you have so much to do at work. This is one of the reasons infectious diseases spread so quickly in the workplace.

What can your employer do to prevent communicable diseases?

Employers in Manitoba are legally responsible for the safety and health of all workers. Their responsibilities are outlined in the Workplace Safety

and Health Regulations: Part 4 - General Workplace Requirements and Part 36 - Chemical and Biological Substances. The employer, in consultation with the joint Health and Safety Committee, should develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and control the spread of communicable diseases.

Employers must provide necessary training along with personal protective equipment and convenient hand washing facilities.

A clean environment is essential to prevent the spread of infection. In most workplaces cleaning surfaces with soap and water is sufficient.

It is important to make sure any damaged surfaces are replaced, since germs can

accumulate and survive in rough areas and scratches.

The most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable disease is hand washing.



When should I wash my hands?

- ✓ After using the washroom
- ✓ After toileting/diapering children/clients
- ✓ Before preparing or eating food.
- ✓ After covering a sneeze or cough
- ✓ After blowing your nose
- ✓ Before or after treating a sore/wound
- ✓ Before and after smoking
- ✓ After any cleaning procedures
- ✓ After outdoor activities (e.g., playing with children in a sandpit)

Vaccines are also called needles, shots or immunizations. They help our bodies learn to recognize the germs that cause diseases and fight them. Vaccines are important to prevent the spread of some communicable diseases.



Diseases	Signs/symptoms	Transmission (spread)	What can you do?
Influenza (flu)	Fever, runny nose, fatigue, headache, cough.	Contact with droplets from an infected person's cough	Rest. Drink plenty of fluids. Stay home if you are sick. Take a flu shot every year.
Chicken pox	Mild fever Itchy blistering rash	Being in the same air space with infected persons. Contact with fluid draining from blisters.	If you have chicken pox, stay home until the blisters have crusted over. Do not scratch. If you have been exposed to chicken pox and you are not immune, see your doctor about a vaccine.
Tuberculosis	Cough lasting more than three weeks, fever, night sweats, unplanned weight loss, loss of appetite, swollen glands, tiredness, chest pain	Transmitted from person to person by breathing infected air during close contact.	Take medication exactly as prescribed and follow a well balanced diet.
Head Lice	Scratching scalp due to nits (tan coloured eggs found close to the scalp)	Head to head contact. Sharing of hats, hair brushes, hair ribbons.	Use medicated shampoo/cream rinse, two treatments seven days apart and comb hair with a nit comb. Wash headgear, hair brushes, bed linens in hot soapy water.
Scabies (mites)	Rash anywhere on body from neck down (fingers, toes, wrists, elbows, armpits, groin, waist). Rash itchier at night.	Direct skin-to-skin contact with a person infected with scabies. Can spread through contact with bedding.	Use medicated lotion for treating scabies. Wash clothing and bed linens in hot soapy water. Do not scratch.

How should you protect yourself from communicable diseases at work?

- Wash your hands often.
- Eat well, stay active and get enough sleep to help you stay healthy.
- See a doctor if you become ill and stay home until you feel better.
- Inform your supervisor if you develop a communicable disease due to exposure at work.
- Report all incidents involving exposure to blood or body fluids and immediately see a doctor.
- Use required personal protective equipment such as gloves and masks.

For more information contact
MFL Occupational Health Centre
102-275 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4M6
Phone: 204-949-0811
Fax: 204-956-0848
Toll Free: 1-888-843-1229 (Manitoba only)

For information on specific diseases visit
Public Health Agency of Canada – Infectious Diseases
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/index-eng.php>

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