

## HSE POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF BIOLOGICAL AGENTS IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR 2017

FAST FACT, REF FF:011:01

**FAST FACTS** provide a brief overview of various health and safety topics to support our managers, employees, safety representatives and others. Additional information, if required, is available by visiting our website at: [www.hse.ie/safetyandwellbeing](http://www.hse.ie/safetyandwellbeing) or by contacting the National Health and Safety Function Helpdesk. Why not bring this to your Safety Committees/Departmental Meeting for discussion?

This FAST FACT provides a brief overview of the **HSE Policy on the Management of Biological Agents in the Healthcare Sector 2017**. The policy can be downloaded [here](#).

**DID YOU KNOW THAT** A biological agent is a micro-organism, including those that have been genetically modified, a cell culture or a human endoparasite, which may be able to provoke any infection, allergy or toxicity and are classified into **four risk groups** according to their level of risk of infection.

### POLICY STATEMENT

The HSE acknowledges that some employees may be exposed through work activities to biological agent(s), which may either be deliberate (e.g. Laboratory work) or incidental (e.g. direct patient care, maintenance activities, laundry activities), and in compliance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013, and the associated Code of Practice (2013) (CoP), are committed to eliminating or reducing the risk of exposure.



### PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to raise awareness and provide support to managers (responsible persons) and employees. The Policy demonstrates how the management of biological agents is an integral part of managing the control of infection and that the control measures required by health and safety legislation should already be in place as part of infection control procedures.

### SCOPE

This Policy applies to all HSE employees, fixed term employees, temporary employees and students. It also applies to agency workers, contractors or any persons whose work activities may involve the risk of exposure to a biological agent.

### KEY HEALTH AND SAFETY LEGISLATION

- The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005.
- The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013 & Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013 (CoP)



### MANAGERS' KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Have an understanding of what constitutes a biological agent and has available to the the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations (2013) and associated CoP
- Carrying out written risk assessments which identify the hazards and the risk associated with exposure to a biological agent, and ensuring appropriate measures are put in place to eliminate, control or minimise the risk
- Where the risk assessment indicates that there is a risk of exposure to a biological agent for which an effective vaccine exists, ensure vaccines are offered free of charge to the employees at risk, and ensure relevant health surveillance is made available through Occupational Health.

## MANAGERS KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES CONT.

- Provide employees with appropriate information, instruction, supervision and training
- Ensure a biological agents emergency plan is in place to prevent or mitigate the potential for emergency situations (e.g. Aerosal release, needlestick injury, spills, biological safety cabinet failure)
- Ensure that incidents involving exposure to biological agents are reported and managed in line with this policy

## EMPLOYEES KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees must:

- Understand what constitutes a biological agent
- Adhere to and apply this Policy, local procedures and safe systems of work and any associated risk assessments and risk controls

Detailed Roles and Responsibilities are outlined in the *HSE Policy on the Management of Biological Agents in the Healthcare Sector 2017*

## RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Prevention of exposure to a biological agent is an underlying principle of the Regulations. To ensure this preventative principle is followed a biological agents risk assessment must be undertaken using the Biological Agents Risk Assessment form to determine if existing workplace controls are adequate.

Health and Safety General Risk Assessment Form					
Division:		Source of Risk:			
HSE/CHO/NAJ/Function:		Primary Impact Category:			
Hospital Site/Service:		Risk Type:			
Dept./Service Site:		Name of Risk Owner (BLOCKS):			
Date of Assessment:		Signature of Risk Owner:			
Unique ID No:		Risk Co-Ordinator:			
HAZARD & RISK DESCRIPTION		EXISTING CONTROL MEASURES	ADDITIONAL CONTROLS REQUIRED	ACTION OWNER	DUE DATE
INITIAL RISK		Risk Status			
Likelihood	Impact	Initial Risk Rating	Open	Monitor	Closed

The risk assessment process for a given task comprises of the following **FOUR STEPS** which are detailed in *Appendix 1 HSE Policy on the Management of Biological Agents in the Healthcare Sector 2017*

**Step 1 - Identify the Hazard**

**Step 2- Identify the Risks** associated with the hazard

**Step 3 - Assess** (i.e. Rate) the risks

**Step 4 - Identify any additional control measures** (if any) required (i.e. **evaluate and treat the risks**)

## A STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURE FOR POLICY

A step-by-step procedure to implement the *HSE Policy on the Management of Biological Agents in the Healthcare Sector 2017* is given in Appendix VII of the Policy

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION (FOR FULL LIST PLEASE REFER TO POLICY)

- HSA (2013). Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations. Available [here](#)
- HSA (2014) Guidelines to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013. Available [here](#)

