

8.5 COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

1. INTRODUCTION

As part of its commitment to providing a safe and healthy environment for staff, students and visitors, the University has developed the following policy to address the issue of communicable diseases. The policy covers the University's commitments and responsibilities as well as key legislative and external policy requirements. UTS will continue to develop procedures and safe practice guidelines to address the specific needs of faculties and units.

2. STATEMENT OF INTENT

The University will undertake to minimise the risk of infection to staff and students posed by communicable diseases.

Because of this commitment the University will:

- (a) identify activities which may place staff and students at risk of acquiring a communicable disease during the course of their work or study
- (b) provide staff and students at risk of acquiring a communicable disease during the course of their work or study with relevant information and appropriate instruction
- (c) provide an appropriate medical service for staff and students, including first aid, immunisation and medical follow up for potential exposures
- (d) establish, document and promote safe working practices which are relevant to work and study areas
- (e) establish procedures for reporting and investigating, in an appropriate manner, accidents and incidents which place a staff member or student at risk of acquiring a communicable disease
- (f) monitor the effectiveness of this policy within the University.

The University will, in accordance with its Equal Opportunity policy, protect staff and students from harassment, discrimination and victimisation in relation to infection with a communicable disease.

In order to strengthen this commitment the University will:

- (a) inform staff and students of the disability provisions of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act and the Federal Disability Discrimination Act
- (b) not tolerate any form of discrimination and/or victimisation against staff or students who have, or are perceived to have, or who are identified with a group perceived to be at high risk of having a communicable disease
- (c) ensure that exclusion from the University because of a communicable disease is only on the grounds of medical exclusion for public health reasons as per advice from the NSW Department of Health
- (d) maintain confidentiality of information with respect to staff and students with medical diagnoses.

The University will support staff and students by promoting informed awareness, understanding and tolerance of the issues and concerns relating to communicable diseases.

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In order to maintain this commitment the University will:

- (a) provide staff and students with relevant information concerning the transmission of communicable diseases
- (b) provide staff and students with specific guidelines, resources and practical instruction for minimising risk of infection in potential risk-related work and study activities
- (c) provide support to staff and students in relation to issues, problems and stresses associated with specific communicable diseases.

The University is committed to protecting and supporting staff and students in relation to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and AIDS-related conditions and the Hepatitis Viruses and in maintaining the physical and emotional well-being in relation to work and study for staff and students who are in any way affected by these viruses.

In order to support this commitment the University will:

- (a) ensure that staff and students with these viruses have the same rights, benefits and opportunities as others with serious or life-threatening illnesses
- (b) ensure that staff and students are informed of the disability provisions of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act and the Federal Disability Discrimination Act related to HIV and AIDS
- (c) promote understanding of the unique requirements of staff and students in relation to these infections
- (d) provide staff and students with relevant information concerning the transmission and prevention of these viruses
- (e) provide support for staff and students in relation to issues, problems and stresses associated with these infections.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

Protection of the University community in relation to communicable diseases is a shared responsibility.

- (a) **Faculties and Units**, using the criteria provided in this policy, are responsible for identifying activities that may place staff and students at risk of acquiring a communicable disease. Staff and students identified as at risk of acquiring a communicable disease during the course of their work or study should be provided with information that includes generic safe work practices, immunisation and reporting and reacting to exposures.

The Environment, Health and Safety Branch will provide faculties and units with access to relevant information and advice on managing individual exposures to blood and body fluids.

Faculties and units should:

- establish and document procedures for safe work practice specific to the activities which may place staff or students at risk
- provide staff and students with information and training in safe work practice specific to the activities which may place staff or students at risk
- promote immunisation for preventable diseases to staff and students at risk of acquiring a communicable disease during the course of their work or study
- encourage the reporting of individual exposures to blood and body fluids
- ensure that incidents involving individual exposures to blood and body fluids are managed appropriately.

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- (b) **Academics**, who teach students identified as at risk of acquiring a communicable disease during the course of their work or study are responsible for providing students with relevant information on communicable diseases. It is also the responsibility of academics to promote the availability of immunisation for preventable diseases to students at risk of acquiring a communicable disease during the course of their study.
- (c) **Supervisors**, of staff and students undertaking 'at risk' activities (including academics supervising students) are responsible for:
- providing staff and students with relevant information and training in safe work practice for specific activities which may place staff or students at risk
 - ensuring that staff or students who have been affected by an incident involving exposure to blood or body fluids are provided with appropriate first aid and have access to medical services
 - investigating incidents involving exposure to blood and body fluids, taking appropriate preventative action and reporting the incident to the Environment, Health and Safety Branch.
- (d) **Each member of staff and each student**, is responsible for following the established procedures for safe work practice and not wilfully placing at risk the health, safety and well-being of others. This responsibility includes:
- using personal protective equipment as required
 - reporting incidents involving exposure to blood or body fluids
 - seeking information or advice as necessary, particularly while carrying out new or unfamiliar work.

A number of support areas have key responsibilities in relation to the effective implementation of the policy. They are as follows:

- (a) **The Environment, Health and Safety Branch**, is responsible for providing staff and students with access to relevant information on communicable diseases at UTS. This includes information on generic safe work practices, immunisation and reporting and reacting to exposures.

With respect to exposure-related incidents the Environment, Health and Safety Branch is responsible for:

- promoting and monitoring the reporting of individual exposures to blood and body fluids
- providing advice and support to faculties and units when managing an individual exposure to blood and body fluids.

A further responsibility of the Environment, Health and Safety Branch is to provide relevant information, training and personal protective equipment to First Aid Officers.

- (b) **The Equity and Diversity Unit**, is responsible for providing support and advice to staff and students on issues of discrimination, harassment and victimisation relating to communicable diseases. This includes providing staff and students with access to information on the Anti-Discrimination Act and the Federal Disability Discrimination Act and relevant provisions of the legislation within the University.
- (c) **Student Services**, is responsible for providing relevant information and medical advice to staff and students on the transmission of communicable diseases. This includes:
- providing an immunisation service
 - offering an appropriate medical service for the management of individuals potentially exposed to communicable diseases in accordance with the relevant Department of Health Guidelines
 - providing appropriate medical advice to staff and students suffering from a communicable disease
 - promoting the services that are available to staff and students.

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- (d) **The Registrar**, is responsible for implementing the guidelines for the medical exclusion of students in accordance with this policy and the rules of the University.

4. ACTIVITIES WHICH MAY PLACE STAFF AND STUDENTS AT RISK OF EXPOSURE TO COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Faculties and Units, are responsible for determining any activities that may place staff and students at risk of acquiring a communicable disease during the course of their work or study. These include:

- (a) any tasks involving contact with blood and other body fluids or handling contaminated sharps, such as, working with clients/patients in health care facilities, administering first aid, some laboratory work
- (b) working with specimens of human or animal origin
- (c) outdoor work involving exposure to soil, potting mix, sewage, dirty tools or used and discarded syringes
- (d) working with children, such as in childcare centres, health care facilities
- (e) travel overseas in the course of work or study.

5. ACTION REQUIRED TO MINIMISE THE RISK

The activities identified below are associated with different levels of risk and therefore require different actions in order to minimise the risk.

The following table outlines the action required to minimise the risks related to these activities.

ACTIVITY	ACTION REQUIRED BY FACULTY/UNIT TO MINIMISE THE RISK
a) and/or b) (highest risk activities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ provide staff and students with information on immunisation, safe work practices and reporting of incidents involving potential exposure to blood and body fluids▪ establish and document specific procedures for safe work practice and/or immunisation and provide staff and students with relevant information and training in these procedures▪ provide and maintain appropriate personal protective equipment▪ provide training for supervisors in the procedures for reporting and reacting to incidents involving potential exposure to blood and body fluids
c) or d)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ provide staff and students with information on immunisation▪ provide and maintain appropriate personal protective equipment▪ appoint an adequate number of First Aid Officers for the area and provide medical assessment if an incident occurs
e)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ provide information on immunisation and suggest that staff and students seek medical advice on specific immunisation requirements related to their travel

6. EXCLUSION

The Infectious Diseases Guidelines, developed in accordance with the recommendations of the National Health and Medical Research Council and adopted by Council, [Resolution COU/94/141], provide direction for the exclusion of staff and students suffering from specific communicable diseases.

The Office of the Registrar is responsible for ensuring that students comply with the By-law, Rules and Policies of the University. In a situation where a student is excluded under this section of the policy Rules 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.4 and 2.4.6 may be invoked.

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7. MANAGEMENT OF EXPOSURE TO BLOOD OR BODY FLUIDS

All incidents, which place a staff member or student at risk of infection from exposure to blood or body fluids, should be managed in accordance with NSW Department of Health Guidelines. The Department of Health Guidelines make recommendations about the immediate management of occupational exposures which include providing first aid and an appropriate medical assessment immediately after the incident.

In the event of an incident involving an exposure to blood or body fluids the staff member or student at risk should be referred immediately to either the University Health Service in the Student Services Unit or their own doctor for a medical assessment.

The Environment, Health and Safety Branch can provide faculties and units with advice on managing exposures to blood and body fluids.

8. IMMUNISATION

The University recommends that staff and students at risk of exposure to communicable diseases are aware of their immune status. Staff and students who are not immune are advised to undertake the recommended course of immunisation in order to minimise the risk of contracting a serious, vaccine preventable disease.

The University recognises that staff and students have a right to:

- (a) choose whether or not to be vaccinated
- (b) choose whether or not to disclose their immune status.

Students who choose not to be vaccinated, or choose not to disclose their immune status, may have their progress or placement within the University limited if these requirements prevent them from completing the practical components of the course.

In accordance with the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act and the Federal Disability Discrimination Act, staff and students *cannot* be asked to disclose their immune status. All University Health Service records of staff and students are held in confidence. Staff and students may have access to their own records at any time. Further information on www.ehs.uts.edu.au.