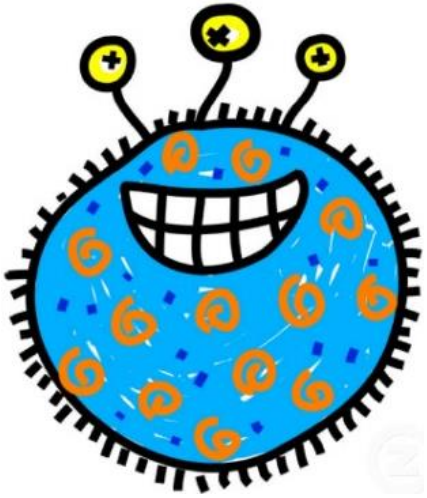
GERMS!

KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BACTERIA AND VIRUS INFECTION



This information leaflet has been produced to give you an understanding of what these infections are and offer practical advice about the actions you should take to keep free from infection at work

INFECTIONS: Infections are caused by two different types of germs: viruses and bacteria.

VIRUS: There are many types of virus that range from those that cause flu to others that cause illness such as hepatitis. Immunisation can protect against infection from some viruses such as seasonal flu. Viral infections are not curable by anti-biotics.

- **Seasonal Flu:** October and November marks the traditional start of the well-established flu season, with the flu virus spreading from person to person when their moisture from perspiration, speech, coughing or sneezing comes into contact with a non-infected person.
- **Other Respiratory Viruses:** Occasionally other types of viral illnesses hit the headlines, for example, Swine Flu, Avian Flu and more recently Coronavirus. Such viruses often originate from animals and then manage to jump species to humans. As these are new diseases there is initially no specific vaccine available.
- **Hepatitis:** The strains of virus that affect the liver are Hepatitis A, B, C, D, E, F or G, with vaccinations only available against the hepatitis A and B strain.

The Hepatitis A and E virus is spread by infected faeces contaminating food or water entering the uninfected person when eating and drinking. It can also be spread through poor hand hygiene after contact with infected faeces. In addition to the risk of viral infection, faeces also contain bacteria that causes stomach upsets if ingested.

Hepatitis B, C, D and G is spread by contact with infected blood e.g. through the sharing of needles (e.g. drugs or needles used for tattoos), or unsafe sexual acts.

Hepatitis F is a strain that is not attributed to the other strains of hepatitis.

BACTERIA: There are also many types of bacteria. Whilst our body will produce its own bacteria to help prevent infection, bacteria from other sources can cause serious infections such as bacterial meningitis or tetanus. Harmful bacterium is generally treated by anti-biotics.

- **Bacterial Meningitis:** Can lead to meningococcal septicaemia that typically presents with a pin-prick rash that does not go away when pressed. It can occur at any age with people aged 15-24 at higher risk. It is spread by people coughing, sneezing or kissing.

- **Tetanus:** Is caused by a bacterium called Clostridium Tetani which is found in soil and animal manure. Spores of the bacteria are picked up when a wound is contaminated by, for example, contaminated soil. A tetanus vaccine is available from your GP.
- **Toxocariasis / Campylobacter:** Bacteria from dog faeces can include toxocariasis and campylobacter. Toxocariasis is a round worm infection spread through the faeces of an infected dog that can cause blindness in humans. Campylobacter develops from eating products such as raw meat or faecal oral contamination.

WORKPLACE HEALTH HAZARDS: The potential for being infected at work is not as great as you may think. Being exposed to soil or people with flu or the body fluids of other people does not automatically mean you will become ill – soil may not be contaminated by harmful bacteria and the exposure to the body fluids of others will only be harmful if the body fluid is infected and the infected fluid then enters your body.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR HEALTH: Preventing hand / mouth transmission of germs is the single most important action that prevents many germs entering our body. Simple precautions are:

- **Good Hand Hygiene:** Good hand hygiene cannot be over emphasized. Wash hands regularly in warm, soapy water and dry with single use paper towels where possible.
- **Anti-bacterial / Viral Hand Gels:** Can be used if you cannot get to hand wash facilities easily.
- **Coughing / Sneezing:** Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Sneeze into the crook of your arm to avoid spreading germs to your hands. Always 'bag it and bin it' i.e. into a tissue which you throw promptly into a bin.

If needed your Manager will undertake a risk assessment that will identify tasks that may expose you to health hazards from bacterial or viral infection. This could include:

- **Dealing with Body Fluids:** Staff are trained in the use of special kits that absorb blood or other body fluids that can then be safely disposed of.
- **Safely Collecting & Disposing of Items eg Disguarded Used Syringes:** Staff are trained to use special kits that contain instruments that pick up used syringes, similar sharp items without hand contact. These are placed in a special container issued for the safe disposal of such items.

If you require training to deal with body fluids or to safely collect and dispose of disguarded sharp objects, please ask your Manager. Your GP can advise on immunisations.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is the last line of defence, with types varying according to need. PPE use is based on the assessment of risk, eg:

- Grounds and Gardens staff carry out tasks such a strimming, during which sharp objects such as thorns or used needles could penetrate normal clothing or pierce the skin. To prevent this from happening special 'sharp' resistant trousers and gloves are worn. In addition, eye protection also helps to reduce the risk of a piercing injury or of dog or human waste being sprayed into the face.
- Domestics cleaning heavily soiled toilets have disposable overshoes, gloves and overalls to wear. Overalls reduce the risk of clothing being contaminated. Face masks reduce exposure to unpleasant odours and offer protection to stop any splashes entering the mouth.

- First Aiders are trained to provide treatment without risks to their own health and items such as disposable gloves and disposable airways are provided to assist this.