

Biological agents bulletin

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Introduction

As Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP), I am delighted that the next edition of the *Biological agents bulletin* is going live and hope it will provide a useable and informative source for interested parties. The committee exists to provide government with information on dangerous pathogens, particularly in the workplace and the environment, and for the general public.

It is a great pleasure to serve as Chairman of this committee, which works in a highly effective and focused way. The questions we are asked to address are of great national interest and significance. There is close working with other government committees advising on emerging infections and pathogens within the environment. The questions involve a fascinating variety and range of topics, for example from how to safely dispose of waste from vaccine production to the threat posed by viral infections in wild animals.

The committee is composed of a group of independent experts from many different disciplines, with advisors from the Department of Health, Health Protection Agency, the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and co-ordinate the response to important questions of infection which we face. I hope you enjoy this bulletin and find it a source of useful information.

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ACDP guidance: Recent publications

ACDP guidance for those who work with biological agents, primarily in the laboratory setting, was provided in *Categorisation of biological agents according to hazard and categories of containment* published in 1995. This guidance needed updating to reflect changes introduced by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) and also to provide guidance to cover all occupations where exposure to dangerous pathogens can occur. During its revision, an ACDP Working Group decided that the document should be split into separate pieces of guidance, each targeted at a different audience. These are:

- *Biological agents: The principles, design and operation of containment level 4 facilities* (published in May 2006) is aimed at those responsible for working with the highest hazard pathogens. That means all laboratories where high hazard human pathogens may be handled; prevention of exposure and potential infection from these highly pathogenic organisms is important for both workers' health and safety and public health. The guidance also usefully cross-

refers and links to both animal pathogen and genetically modified organisms' legislation. You can find it at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/web09.pdf.

- *Biological agents: Managing the risks in the laboratory and healthcare premises* was published in July 2005 and is aimed at those working with biological agents in laboratory and healthcare settings, who are at greatest risk of contact with infectious material. This publication links the more specific pieces of ACDP guidance and provides advice on some of the more central themes of managing the risks from biological agents at work, such as risk assessment. It does not duplicate the more specific guidance on say, containment requirements, but signposts readers to appropriate publications, both ACDP and other relevant publications. Guidance on the application of COSHH containment measures in the healthcare setting is new, but the approach taken has been to link the control measures in COSHH with existing Department of Health and NHS guidance on control of infection. The aim of this guidance is not to further increase the burden on the healthcare sector, but to show how the process of risk assessment is an integral part of managing the control of infection, and that the control measures required by health and safety legislation should already largely be in place as part of the infection control policy. This guidance can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/biologagents.pdf.
- In 2004, HSC approved the fourth update of the official classification on biological agents, *The approved list of biological agents*, and published this as a standalone document. The COSHH legislation imposes requirements by reference to this document, which are legally binding. The Notice of Approval signed by the Secretary of the Health and Safety Commission signals its legal status. The list implements the Community classification of biological agents set out in European Community Directive 93/88/EEC1, as amended by Commission Directives 95/30/EC2, 97/59/EC3 and 97/65/EC44. This document can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/misc208.pdf.
- *Infection at work: Controlling the risks*. This leaflet was produced for all occupations where incidental exposure to biological agents could occur, such as farmers, refuse collectors and cleaners. This is available on HSE's website at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/infection.pdf.
- *The management, design and operation of microbiological containment laboratories* aimed at those responsible for the management and operation of containment level 2 and containment level 3 laboratories. This guidance expands and explains the legal requirements set out in the biological agents provisions of COSHH, with particular attention to how these requirements influence design, construction and operation of containment level 2 and containment level 3 laboratories. This is a priced publication available from HSE Books (*The management, design and operation of microbiological containment laboratories* ISBN 0 7176 2034 4 HSE Books 2001).

In addition, the ACDP guidance *Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy agents: Safe working and the prevention of infection* was published in 2003, but sections are updated as further scientific information becomes available or future policy decisions need to be reflected. The following changes or additions were made recently:

- Annex F of this guidance 'Endoscopes' was revised by the ACDP TSE Working Group in November 2005 to clarify the risk of CJD transmission, associated with various types of endoscopic procedures. A consensus statement from the British Society of Gastroenterology Decontamination Working Group and the ACDP TSE Working Group Endoscopy and vCJD Sub-Group on 'Endoscopy and individuals at risk of vCJD for public health purposes' was also published to explain the rationale behind the revised advice. Both are available from: www.advisorybodies.doh.gov.uk/acdp/tseguidance/index.htm.

- An annex on pre-surgery and endoscopy assessment to identify patients with, or at risk of, CJD was added to the TSE guidelines in July 2006. This new annex, Annex J, gives essential advice to clinicians about the need to conduct comprehensive pre-surgery assessment. This is available from: www.advisorybodies.doh.gov.uk/acdp/tseguidance/index.htm.

Bird flu (avian influenza)

ACDP met on 28 October 2005 to consider the public health measures that would be needed in the event of avian influenza (AI), either low pathogenic or high pathogenic, being found in poultry or wild birds in the UK. The committee considered the following:

- Guidance on precautions to be taken by the poultry industry to protect workers from avian influenza infection - ACDP-endorsed guidance produced by a cross-government and industry working group, available from www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/diseases/avianflu.htm.
- Guidance for the public on the submission of dead birds for testing and for Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust staff for taking samples from live birds (as part of the DEFRA surveillance programme of wild birds for avian flu). ACDP gave comments on draft guidance which has now been published on the DEFRA website: www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/wildbirds/index.htm.

Further details can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/meetings/acdp/281005/minutes.pdf.

Abattoir workers: Guidelines to minimise the risk of exposure to BSE

Following a review of the over thirty-month rule Health and Rural Affairs Ministers have agreed that cattle born after 1 August 1996 may now enter the food chain. This will depend on each animal testing negative for BSE, before release. Advice from the ACDP for abattoir workers processing such cattle has been put on the HSE website.

The guidance includes information on:

- personal protective equipment;
- hygiene measures;
- stunning;
- removal of the spinal cord;
- cleaning the abattoir.

The guidance can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/diseases/bovine.htm.

Coming up

Revised guidance on:

- containment devices for small animals;
- management and control of viral haemorrhagic fevers;
- protection against blood-borne infections in the workplace: HIV and hepatitis.

Other recently published guidance

Controlling the risks of infection at work from human remains:
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/web01.pdf.

Management of spa pools: Controlling the risks of infection:
www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/diseases/legionnaires.htm
www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/legionella/advice.htm

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