



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Show Caution by Using “Standard Precautions”

By Anne Lowder

I was asked by a transit driver: “How can we protect ourselves against viruses or other types of diseases?” The answer is by practicing “standard precautions.” **Standard precautions** are safety practices developed by Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 1996 for health-care workers, but they also apply to other professions where there is a risk of exposure to bloodborne and other pathogens. Being out in public, you and your passengers can be exposed to a variety of infectious diseases, but being aware of how these diseases are spread—and what you can do to minimize exposure—can increase safety.

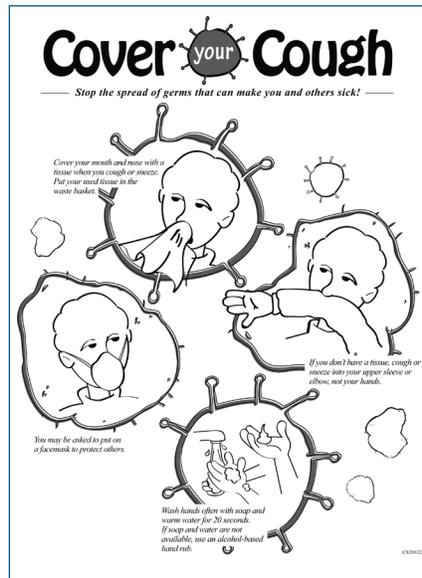
How diseases are spread

Diseases are spread:

- **Through touch** (such as touching a germ door knob then rubbing your eyes),
- **By respiratory droplet transmission** in the air (from a sick person sneezing in your vicinity),
- **Through ingestion** (usually by eating something that has been contaminated by touch, like not washing your hands before you eat), and
- **By vector-borne transmission** by being bitten by an infected animal or insect or being pricked by a contaminated sharp object.

Standard Precautions to minimize exposure

Touching a contaminated surface is the most common way people are exposed to infectious diseases. Your transit vehicle is used by many people. They touch the handrails on your vehicle, touch the seat backs as they stand or sit, and touch money that is deposited for their fares.



The Centers for Disease Control has posters on Standard Precautions that you can post on your vehicles and in your agency facilities.

Source: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/infectioncontrol/cover/hcp/hcpcposter.html>

Each provides an avenue for contact transmission. For example, an infected person uses the handrails to board. Saliva on his hand comes in contact with the handrails. You and your other passengers who use the handrails to enter or exit the vehicle have been exposed through contact transmission.

A standard precaution to prevent being infected through touch is practicing good hygiene, such as hand washing or sanitizing when possible. Keep hand sanitizer on your vehicle. To further protect yourself and your passengers, wipe down the handrails, seats and seat

belts on your vehicle with a disinfecting surface cleaner and disposable towels as many times during the day as possible.

Breathing contamination can occur by respiratory droplet transmission through the air by someone sneezing on you or you sneezing on someone. Be professional and always cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent spreading an infection. The proper way is to cough or sneeze into a tissue and then put the tissue into a waste basket. If you do not have a tissue, then cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not into your hands.

Measures to avoid the spread of respiratory secretions among your passengers should be promoted. Elements of respiratory hygiene and cough include providing supplies such as tissues, waste baskets and, hand sanitizers for your passengers. Also place cough etiquette signs (such as the Centers for Disease Control poster at left) where the general public can see them.

Ingestion contamination usually occurs by eating something that has been contaminated by touch. The standard precaution is to avoid hand-to-face contact. Hand-to-face contact is a common way that people catch infectious diseases. If your hands are germ and you eat or apply lip balm, smoke, or handle your contact lenses you have just contaminated yourself with those germs. The best prevention is washing your hands before eating, applying lip balm, rubbing your eyes or putting in your contacts.

Vector-borne transmission is when a person's skin is penetrated by an infectious source, such as an insect bite or sharpie

such as a needle. Standard prevention is to use insect repellent and be cautious when handling trash. Proper PPE for handling trash is to wear heavy gloves. Err on the side of caution and know that any trash bag may contain a needle or other sharp object. Never use your hands, feet or unprotected skin to compress trash, never hold bags close to the body, and keep trash loads light to avoid splitting the bag (and back injury from awkward lifting).

Skin is a barrier but personal protective equipment (PPE) is better

Unbroken skin is an effective barrier against bloodborne pathogens. However, infected blood or other bodily fluids can enter the skin through open sores, damaged skin (sunburns or blisters), paper cuts, hangnails or even acne.

The most basic protection is a barrier between you and the contaminated material. For example if someone is bleeding, give that person a clean bandage or rag to absorb the blood instead of doing it for them. If you have to provide first aid to stop the bleeding, put on your nitrile gloves in your first aid kit or bloodborne pathogen kit. Make sure in your pre-trip inspection you verify the gloves will fit you and that they have been changed out on a regular basis. Gloves that have been in the kit over time will have a higher chance of splitting due to exposure to changing temperatures.

Here's a scenario we use during training: A person on your transit vehicle has vomited. What should you do next?

First, check the scene and determine the situation and the number of passengers directly exposed. Once you have determined who is sick, what surfaces have been contaminated and how many passengers are onboard, grab your blood pathogen kit and don the appropriate PPE. In this case the appropriate PPE should be nitrile gloves and goggles.

OSHA regulation requires that employees be provided with appropriate protective equipment and materials. Having a comprehensive biohazard kit aboard all vehicles can help prevent infection from bloodborne pathogens. Items appropriate for a biohazard kit include disposable nitrile or vinyl gloves, paper towels, disinfectant spray effective on HIV and the tuberculosis virus, red plastic trash bags for disposing biohazardous material at a medical disposal facility, face masks, eye protectors such as goggles, antiseptic hand wipes and a leak proof sealable container for any needles found.

Do not walk through a contaminated area. This can spread the contamination. Instead, spread the absorbent material from your kit over the contaminated area and dose the contaminated area with a disinfectant spray. If possible have a 5mm plastic sheet that you can throw over the contaminated area enabling your passengers to exit your vehicle without touching the contamination. Finally take your vehicle in to your facility (or to the designated location depending on your agency's policy) for a thorough cleaning.

Once a biohazard kit is used to clean up a spill or other incident, the materials need to be disposed of properly. If the contamination contains visible blood, your local hospital or health clinic will usually take small amounts for disposal. (Agency management should talk to them in advance to discuss an agreement.) If the body waste is vomit, urine or feces with no visible signs of blood, it can be disposed of in the trash.

Only use PPE that you have been trained to use, such as gloves, goggles, face mask, ty-vek body suit and shoe covers. Do not use PPE that is torn or

punctured. Take off any PPE that you use before leaving the contaminated area and properly dispose of it by bagging it and putting it into the trash. Also it is very

For more information on this topic refer to

<http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/settings/outpatient/outpatient-care-gl-standard-precautions.html> or http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m4240177_PreventingSpreadBloodbornePathogensFactandSkill.pdf

Sources

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important to wash your hands and exposed skin immediately after removing your PPE.

Summary

Understanding how diseases are spread and taking Standard Precautions can help you to prevent exposure to infectious diseases. When in doubt, treat all bodily fluids, whether bloody or not, as potentially infectious material. Always wear the appropriate personal protective equipment for the job. Practice good hygiene on your vehicle by disinfecting surface areas. And practice good personal hygiene by always washing your hands thoroughly whenever possible. Keep facial tissue and hand sanitizer on your vehicles for use by yourself and your passengers. ●

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