

**Ministry of Health and
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March 28, 2007

MEMORANDUM TO: Municipal EMS Directors and Managers
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FROM: Malcolm Bates
Director
Emergency Health Services Branch

RE: **Training Bulletin, Issue Number 107 – version 1.0**
Contact Precautions for Enteric Diseases

There have been several reports by Public Health officials of local outbreaks of enteric diseases spread through contact transmission such as *Clostridium difficile* (*C.difficile*) and the Norovirus throughout the province. It is important for all ambulance service operators and paramedics to be vigilant in identifying potential cases of communicable disease and to take appropriate precautions when managing patients to prevent the spread of diseases.

Attached you will find a copy of a training bulletin in PDF format. This bulletin has been developed to provide paramedics with general information on enteric diseases spread through contact transmission. It also relates “best practices” that should be undertaken by paramedics to prevent the transmission of organisms through contact to their patients and themselves.

The training bulletin will be printed and forwarded to you in sufficient quantities so that you can provide every paramedic in your service with a copy. Additionally, this document will be available on the www.ambulance-transition.com web site shortly.

If you require additional information, please contact Ms. Cathy Francis, Manager of Education and Patient Care Standards, at (416) 327-7843.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Bates".

Malcolm Bates

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Contact Precautions for Enteric Diseases

- c: D. Brown, Senior Manager, Operations and Quality Management
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Training Bulletin

Contact Precautions for Enteric Diseases

March 2007

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Emergency Health Services Branch
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Contact Precautions for Enteric Diseases

Introduction

There have been several reports by Public Health officials of local outbreaks of enteric illnesses, such as *Clostridium difficile* (*C.difficile*) and the Norovirus spread through contact transmission. It is important for all involved in the delivery of ambulance services to be vigilant in identifying potential cases of communicable disease and to take appropriate precautions when managing patients to prevent the spread of diseases.

This bulletin has been developed to provide ambulance service operators and paramedics with general information on the spread of diseases through contact transmission, how to identify those who may be ill due to a communicable disease and to relate “best practices” to prevent the transmission of organisms through contact, to their patients and to themselves.

Patient Assessment

The initial patient assessment is a valuable tool for paramedics to identify symptoms of communicable enteric diseases. Patients presenting with the following signs and/or symptoms should be considered to potentially have a communicable enteric disease:

- fever
- chills
- vomiting
- diarrhea

Paramedics should use Routine Practices and Additional Precautions when managing these patients.

Contact Transmission of Communicable Enteric Diseases

Contact transmission is the most common mode of transmission in the health care setting. Transmission often occurs when there is a transfer of an infectious agent directly through touching with contaminated hands or indirectly through a contaminated intermediate object. Indirect transmission may occur if appropriate hand hygiene is not performed between patient contacts. As a result, patient care equipment and other objects may become contaminated.

Best Practices to Prevent Contact Transmission of Communicable Enteric Diseases

Routine Practices

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is by far the most important element in breaking the Chain of Transmission of communicable diseases, including those transmitted through contact. Proper hand hygiene includes the use of alcohol-based hand rubs, hand washing and skin care. Paramedics should perform hand hygiene frequently. Moisturizers will help prevent skin from becoming excessively dry and cracked. Care must be taken to ensure non-intact skin, especially on the hands, as a result of cuts, scrapes, or dermatitis is adequately covered while performing patient care. Healthy intact skin is an effective barrier to infection.

Routine hand hygiene can prevent potential infections from spreading. Hand hygiene can also prevent the contamination of patient care equipment and the environment. The application of an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water, combined with the creation of friction while rubbing the hands is the best way paramedics can protect the patient, themselves, their families, and their colleagues from communicable diseases.

Best practices for performing hand hygiene include:

- at the beginning and end of shift;
- before and after patient contact;
- during and after PPE removal;
- before invasive procedures;
- after cleaning/disinfecting equipment and the vehicle;
- before leaving the emergency department;
- before and after handling food;
- before and after smoking;
- after using the bathroom, or other personal body functions (sneezing, coughing);
- any time hands are visibly soiled.

When hands are visibly soiled, paramedics should ideally wash them with soap and water first. If hand washing facilities are not available, visible soiling should be removed using a moistened towel/towelette followed by the use of an alcohol-based hand rub.

Additional Precautions

In addition to appropriate hand hygiene, paramedics should use the following Additional Precautions when managing patients suspected of being infected with diseases spread through Contact Transmission.

- Gloves should be worn for all patient care activities and removed immediately when patient contact is complete.
- Gowns should be worn when there will be contact of forearms or uniform with the patient and when contact with blood/body fluids is possible. Remove and discard in an appropriate receptacle immediately when patient contact is complete.
- Masks and eye protection should be worn whenever splash with blood/body fluids is possible.
- Single patient transport only.

Post-transport Vehicle/Equipment Cleaning and Disinfection

An important aspect of Routine Practices is the cleaning and disinfection of ambulances and equipment following all patient transports. All re-usable equipment used during the call as well as any equipment that may have been indirectly contaminated (e.g. equipment in open cupboards and/or bags) must be adequately cleaned and disinfected. When cleaning and disinfecting surfaces in the ambulance, emphasis should be placed on the patient care area as well as areas where contact by the patient or paramedics may have occurred.

Paramedics must always remember to follow the manufacturer's recommendations and directions when using cleaning and disinfecting products to ensure best results. Failure to follow the recommended procedures could result in the desired level of disinfection not being achieved.

For more information on cleaning and disinfection procedures, paramedics should consult their local ambulance service policies on infection prevention and control.

Summary

Enteric diseases are only spread by means of contact transmission (contact with the patient or contact with contaminated equipment or objects). By following the above practices, paramedics can greatly reduce the chances of acquiring and/or transmitting enteric diseases, including *C.difficile* and the Norovirus.

For more information on infection prevention and control practices, paramedics should consult their ambulance service provider or their local Public Health Department or Unit.

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the information provided by the Ottawa Public Health Department, as well as the advice of Dr. Rick Verbeek in the review of this bulletin.