

## HIV, hepatitis and sport

People with HIV or hepatitis B or C participate in a wide range of sports without restrictions. The risk that a player infected with one of these blood borne viruses (BBVs) will spread it to other players is extremely small. For example, there are no documented cases of transmission of HIV from one athlete to another during participation in a sporting event.

It is unlawful to prevent a person infected with HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C from participating in sport. Infection control guidelines or the 'blood rule' help keep all sportspeople, coaches, trainers and officials from a range of infections including these blood borne viruses.

### How HIV and hepatitis B and C are spread

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) damages the immune system and can cause acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) if untreated. Hepatitis B and C are viruses that can cause serious damage to the liver.

To become infected with HIV or hepatitis B or C while playing sports, body fluids such as blood from an infected person needs to enter your bloodstream through a significant abrasion (cut) on your skin or mucous membranes (mouth or eyes).

HIV and hepatitis B are spread in similar ways. Because both HIV and hepatitis B are found in blood, semen and vaginal fluids, these infections are transmitted by:

- Unprotected anal, vaginal or oral sex (without a condom or dam) with an infected person
- Sharing needles, syringes and other injecting equipment with an infected person
- Mother to baby during childbirth or breastfeeding.

Hepatitis C is spread through blood to blood only, but is not sexually transmitted unless blood is present.

### Chronic Hepatitis B infection

People with hepatitis B can develop mild, unobserved or severe illness. In most cases, the person clears the infection and they become immune. However, a small percentage of those infected will have chronic hepatitis and be potentially infectious to others as they do not naturally clear the infection themselves.

### It is extremely unlikely you will be infected during sport

The risk of catching HIV or hepatitis B or C from an infected player is:

- Extremely low for other athletes and players involved in contact sports
- Extremely low for first aid officers who follow infection control guidelines
- Unlikely for coaches, trainers, officials and spectators.

HIV and hepatitis B or C cannot be caught from:

- Sweat or saliva from other sportspeople
- Sharing drink bottles with team members
- Shared toilets, showers or spas
- Hugging or shaking hands.

## Participation in sport

The Victorian Equal Opportunity Act makes it unlawful to fail or refuse to select (in a sporting team) a person with HIV or hepatitis B or C or to exclude them from participating in a sporting activity.

People with these viruses are not required to disclose their health status to coaches, sporting teams or sporting organisations. They are entitled to keep the fact that they have HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C confidential.

## Protecting everyone involved in sport

Simple and inexpensive procedures can prevent the spread of HIV, hepatitis B and C. Consult the infection control policies that have been developed and are in practice at your sporting organisations:

- Remember to cover all pre existing wounds before commencing a game.
- Infection control precautions include wearing protective gloves when giving first aid to bleeding players.
- Eyes splashed with blood – rinse the area gently but thoroughly, with the eyes open, with water or normal saline rinsing away from the nose.
- If blood gets in the mouth – spit it out and rinse the mouth with water several times.
- Standard practice is to stop play if a player is bleeding and allow them to return to play only after bleeding is controlled and the wound is properly covered.
- All wounds should be bandaged and all playing surfaces and clothes exposed to blood should be properly cleaned or changed before play recommences.
- It is advisable to have your own drink bottle and towel, mouth guard and other personal items including razors to reduce the possibility of minute blood to blood transmission. If there is concern about potential infection, contact a doctor or health information line for further advice.

To summarise, if a player is injured while playing sport:

- Stop the blood
- Dress the wound
- Clean up the blood.

All players, coaches, trainers, sporting officials and first aid officers should be aware of these infection control guidelines and treat every injury associated with blood as a potential source of HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

It is important to practise safer sex when off the field by using condoms and water based lubricant to protect yourself from HIV, hepatitis B and other sexually transmissible infections

People who inject steroids or other performance enhancing drugs are at risk of HIV and both hepatitis B and C, if they share needles, syringes or any injecting equipment such as swabs, tourniquets etc. Injecting equipment should be used once only and never shared

## Immunisation is available against hepatitis B

You can be immunised against hepatitis B but not against HIV or hepatitis C. Those responsible for managing on-field injuries and players involved in contact sports are strongly advised to be immunised against hepatitis B. Infection control procedures should be used even if you are immunised.

## Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- Australian Sports Medicine Federation, Victorian branch Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9341 6200 or 1800 032 017 or TTY (for the hearing impaired) (03) 9347 8619
- PEP Information Line Tel. 1800 889 887

## Things to remember

- People infected with blood borne viruses (BBVs) such as HIV or hepatitis B or C cannot be banned from playing sport.
- It is very unlikely that players will catch HIV or hepatitis B or C from an infected player.
- Follow infection control guidelines, implement the 'blood rule' policy, and wear gloves when helping bleeding players.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre

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