

## HCWs with HIV performing exposure-prone procedures: CMO letter to HSC

From the Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Michael McBride



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)

**HSS(MD) 21/2015**

**For Action:**

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health &  
Social Care Board/HSC Trusts/NIAS  
GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board  
Head of Dental Services, Health & Social Care Board  
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for onward  
distribution to practice staff*)

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Your Ref:

Our Ref: HSS(MD) 21/2015

Date: 21 December 2015

Dear Colleagues

**Practice of Exposure-Prone Medical Procedures by Healthcare Workers Living with HIV and HBV**

**ACTION REQUIRED**

**HSC Trust Chief Executives should ensure that this information is drawn to the attention of Consultants in GUM, Consultant Virologists and Occupational Health Physicians**

**HSCB should ensure that this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and Practice Managers for onward distribution to all primary care staff; and also to all General Dental Practitioners**

The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public safety has agreed to a change in policy to remove restrictions on Healthcare Workers (HCWs) with HIV practising Exposure-Prone Procedures (EPPs). This change brings Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK and most other western countries and reflects accumulated evidence that shows there is an extremely low risk of transmission from an infected HCW to a patient.

Public Health England (PHE), on behalf of the UK, has developed:

- detailed interim guidance, available on the PHE website, on the implementation of this policy, with consolidated guidance on BBV-infected healthcare workers, including HIV to follow; and
- the register, UKAP-OHR (*UK Advisory Panel for Healthcare Workers Infected with Blood-borne Viruses – Occupational Health Monitoring Register for BBV Infected HCWs*). A paper-based interim version of the UKAP-OHR is available prior to implementation of the electronic register.

These resources are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-advisory-panel-for-healthcare-workers-infected-with-bloodborne-viruses>

The confidential UKAP-OHR will be managed by PHE and will cover the whole UK. The interim paper-based version is being made available to allow HCWs to register and begin to practise EPPs while the electronic UKAP-OHR is in development. It is anticipated that the full electronic register will be available in early 2016 together with the updated, consolidated guidance on the management of HCWs infected with blood-borne viruses.

In addition to being registered on the UKAP-OHR, all HCWs with HIV who wish to practise EPPs must:

(a) either:

- be on effective combination antiretroviral drug therapy (cART), *AND*
- have a plasma viral load <200 copies/ml (<350 IU/ml),

or:

- be an *elite controller*\*

and

(b)

- be subject to plasma viral load monitoring every three months, *AND*
- be under joint supervision of a consultant occupational physician and their treating physician.

\* An elite controller is defined as person living with HIV who is not receiving antiretroviral therapy and who has maintained their viral load below the limits of assay detection for at least three months, based on at least three separate viral load measurements.

#### Initial health clearance for HIV-positive HCWs who wish to perform EPPs

The decision to clear individual HCWs for work involving EPPs is the responsibility of a Consultant occupational physician in consultation with the treating physician. In Northern Ireland this is Dr Martin Tohill FRCP FFOM, Consultant in Occupational Medicine at Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

To help with this decision-making, if required, the following three specialist HIV physicians, Professor Brian Gazzard (London), Dr Keith Radcliffe (Birmingham) and Professor Clifford Leen (Edinburgh) have agreed to provide this advisory service. In addition, UKAP may be consulted on the application of the policy, as needed.

In preparing for clearance to perform EPPs, HCWs are advised to seek and register with a Consultant Occupational Physician, who will, in conjunction with Dr Tohill and their treating physician/consultant virologist, provide their assessment for fitness to initiate or return to EPP work.

For HCWs who are newly diagnosed and/or new to EPP work. Two identified and validated blood sample (IVS) test results will be needed. These will be taken no less than three months apart under the direct supervision of a Consultant Occupational physician, with viral load levels below 200 copies/ml being required to ensure stable suppression of viral load.

For HCWs currently restricted from EPPs who are on cART with undetectable viral load (UDVL), one IVS at least 12 weeks since their last UDVL is sufficient proof of viral suppression on which to grant clearance for EPPs.

Further information about the contents of this letter can be obtained from the UKAP Medical Secretary, Dr Fortune Ncube ([Ukap@phe.gov.uk](mailto:Ukap@phe.gov.uk) or [fortune.ncube@phe.gov.uk](mailto:fortune.ncube@phe.gov.uk)) or Dr Naresh Chada at DHSSPS, [Naresh.chada@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:Naresh.chada@dhsspsni.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely



**DR MICHAEL McBRIDE**  
Chief Medical Officer



**MR SIMON REID**  
Chief Dental Officer



**MRS CHARLOTTE McARDLE**  
Chief Nursing Officer

### **Circulation List**

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This letter is available on the DHSSPS website at  
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