



FAST FACT, REF FF:011:02

HSE POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF BIOLOGICAL AGENTS IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR 2022

FAST FACTS provide a brief overview of various health and safety topics to support our managers, employees, safety representatives and others. Why not bring this to your Safety Committees/Departmental Meeting for discussion? Additional information is available by visiting our website at: <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/health-and-safety/>

This FAST FACT provides a brief overview of the **HSE Policy on the Management of Biological Agents in the Healthcare Sector 2022**. The policy can be downloaded [here](#).

DID YOU KNOW THAT

Biological agents are widely found in the natural environment and as a result are found in many work sectors. They include bacteria, viruses (e.g. HIV, COVID-19, influenza), fungi (including yeasts and moulds) and internal human parasites (endoparasites). In the healthcare environment, exposure to biological agents can be:

- Deliberate or intentional, where the employee works directly (recognised and planned) with the biological agent, in a laboratory or research facility, or
- Incidental or unintentional, where the employee is potentially exposed to the biological agent as a consequence of their work e.g. a healthcare worker may be exposed through direct contact with patients or with contaminated materials, including waste, laundry, contaminated surfaces etc.

DEFINITION (AS PER POLICY) Biological Agents means micro-organisms, including those which have been genetically modified, cell cultures and human endoparasites, which may be able to provoke any infection, allergy or toxicity. Biological Agents are classified into four risk groups - Groups 1, 2, 3 and 4. Under the classification system, Group 1 agents are the least hazardous whilst Group 4 are the most hazardous.



POLICY STATEMENT

- The HSE acknowledges that employees may be exposed through work activities to a biological agent(s) and are therefore committed to eliminating or reducing the risk of exposure in compliance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013 and 2020.

PURPOSE

- The purpose of the Policy is to raise awareness and provide support to managers and employees in meeting their legal obligations.
- To provide a framework for the effective management of biological agents to include the development and review of biological agents risk assessments.
- This Policy demonstrates how the management of biological agents is an integral part of managing the control of infection and that the control measures required by health and safety legislation should already be in place as part of infection prevention control procedures.

SCOPE

- This Policy applies to all HSE employees, fixed term employees, temporary employees and students. It also applies to agency workers, contractors or any other persons work activities which may involve the risk of exposure to a biological agent.
- In line with the [HSE Code of Governance \(2021\)](#) Section 38 and Section 39 organisations are to adopt this policy or develop a policy of their own which is consistent with this policy and provide an assurance to the HSE regarding same.

KEY HEALTH AND SAFETY LEGISLATION

- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013 and 2020



- Understand what constitutes a biological agent and have available to them the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013 and 2020 and the associated 2020 Biological Agents Code of Practice.
- Carrying out written risk assessments which identify the hazards and the risks associated with exposure to biological agents, and ensuring appropriate measures are put in place to eliminate, control or minimise the risk. Where the results of the risk assessment reveal that it is not technically possible to prevent exposure, apply the prevention and risk reduction measures.
- Where the results of the risk assessment identifies a risk to safety, health or welfare of employees, ensure relevant health surveillance is made available.
- Ensure a biological agent's emergency plan is in place to prevent or mitigate the potential for emergency situations.
- Ensure that employees are provided with appropriate information, instruction, supervision and training.
- Ensure incidents involving are reported and managed in line with Section 7.0, Part A of the Policy.

- Understand what constitutes a biological agent.
- Adhere to and apply this Policy, local procedures and safe systems of work and any associated risk assessments and risk controls.

RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Prevention of exposure to a biological agent is an underlying principle of the Regulations. To ensure this preventative principle is followed a documented biological agents risk assessment must be undertaken to determine if existing workplace controls are adequate. The Biological Agents Risk Assessment form CF: 004 is available to download [here](#).

The risk assessment process for a given task comprises of the following **FOUR STEPS** which are detailed in Section 1.1, Part A of the Policy:

- Step 1** - Identify the **Hazard** associated with the work activity
- Step 2** - Identify the **Risks** associated with the hazard
- Step 3** - **Assess** and Rate the Risk
- Step 4** - Identify any **additional control measures**.

[illegible]

PREVENTION AND RISK REDUCTION MEASURES (As per Schedule 2 of The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013)

Measures to be taken where it is not technically possible to prevent exposure to a biological agent:

- Reduce number of employees exposed or likely to be exposed to a biological agent.
- Design work processes and engineering controls to avoid or reduce biological agent exposure risk.
- Use both collective and individual protection measures where exposure cannot be avoided.
- Use of hygiene measures compatible with the aim of preventing or reducing the accidental transfer or release of a biological agent from the place of work.
- Use of the biohazard sign and other relevant warning signs.
- Develop plans to deal with accidents involving a biological agent.
- The testing, where necessary and technically possible, for the presence, outside the primary physical confinement, of a biological agent used at work.
- Use means for the safe collection, storage and disposal of waste.
- Make arrangements for the safe handling and transport of a biological agent at the workplace.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

- Health and Safety Authority Biological Agents Code of Practice 2020. Available [here](#).
- HSA (2014) Guidelines to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013. Available [here](#).