



ANMF (Vic Branch) Policy

Prevention of exposure to pathogens (Infection prevention and control)

1. Introduction

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) [ANMF (Vic Branch)] recognises that nurses, midwives and carers working in healthcare environments and other industries are at risk of exposure to pathogens during the course of their work, creating a risk to their health and safety.

Patients may also be at risk of exposure to pathogens from infected nurses, midwives, carers and other patients.

Risk of transmission is dependent on a range of factors such as: infection prevention and control practices, the infectivity of the individual (eg - the viral load and effect of viral treatments); the clinical context; instruction, training and supervision and the clinical environment.

2. Objective

The objective of this policy is to support the prevention and management of risks to the health and safety of Victorian nurses, midwives and carers, arising from exposure to pathogens, during the course of their work.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all ANMF (Vic Branch) members, and all nurses, midwives and carers eligible for ANMF (Vic Branch) membership working in Victorian healthcare environments and other industries.

4. Definitions

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): is protective clothing, helmets, goggles, or other garments or equipment designed to protect the wearer's body from injury or infection.

Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE): is a particular type of PPE used to protect the individual wearer against the inhalation of hazardous substances in workplace air.

Respiratory Protection Program (RPP): The primary objective of the respiratory protection program is to prevent exposure to air contaminated with harmful dusts, fogs, fumes, mists, gases, smokes, vapours, or sprays, and thus to prevent occupational illness. A program administrator must be responsible for the program.

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC): is a scientific approach and practical solution designed to prevent harm caused by infection to patients and health workers.

Standard precautions: are the minimum infection prevention practices that apply to all patient care, regardless of suspected or confirmed infection status of the patient, in any setting where health care is delivered. These practices are designed to both protect HCWs and prevent HCWs from spreading infections among patients, and include:

1. Hand hygiene
2. Use of personal protective equipment (eg - gloves, masks, eyewear)
3. Respiratory hygiene / cough etiquette
4. Sharps safety (engineering and work practice controls)
5. Safe injection practices (ie - aseptic technique for parenteral medications)
6. Sterile instruments and devices
7. Clean and disinfected environmental surfaces

5. Policy

- 5.1 Under the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, all employees have a right to perform their work in an environment that is safe and without risks to health, from exposure to pathogens.
- 5.2 All nurses, midwives and carers should have access to and be encouraged to undergo regular free confidential testing and appropriate treatment for pathogens which may be occupationally acquired and injurious to self or others.
- 5.3 All nurses, midwives and carers should be offered free vaccination against pathogens where vaccines have been developed.
- 5.4 Where a nurse, midwife or carer has been potentially exposed to a pathogen, they should be offered counselling, testing and where appropriate, treatment to reduce the risk of infection and/or ongoing illness.
- 5.5 Where a nurse, midwife or carer has potentially been exposed to a pathogen, they should not perform at risk activities until safe to do so.

6. Key elements

6.1 Employers

- 6.1.1 Employers must implement the hierarchy of control, and approach and consider exposure to pathogens and infection prevention and control in the context of occupational health and safety risk management. This should consider risks to nurses, midwives, carers, and patients.
- 6.1.2 Employers must have an effective infection prevention and control strategy and provide a safe working environment that minimizes the risk of exposure to pathogens.
- 6.1.3 Employers of nurses, midwives and carers must consider, and comply with relevant OHS, anti-discrimination, privacy, industrial relations and equal opportunity legislation when dealing with nurses, midwives, carers and patients exposed to pathogens or the consequences thereof.

6.2 Environment

- 6.2.1 Providing a physical working environment that is conducive to infection prevention and control is critical to ensuring the safety of nurses, midwives and carers. This includes consideration and provision of the following:
 - Adequate and properly maintained ventilation systems
 - Isolation and negative pressure rooms and areas, as appropriate
 - Air locks at the point of entry and exit
- 6.2.2 Appropriate amenities for nurses, midwives and carers to change, don and doff PPE, shower, take breaks (including meal and rest breaks) must be provided, and must be of adequate size, with appropriate ventilation and facilities, close to areas of work, readily accessible, and maintained and cleaned regularly.
- 6.2.3 There must be an agreed schedule of cleaning and maintenance undertaken in all environments which are exposed to pathogens, completed by sufficiently trained, dedicated staff.

6.3 Processes and procedures

- 6.3.1 All processes and procedures must be aligned with and integrate consideration of exposure to pathogens, and the principles herein.
- 6.3.2 Waste must be regularly removed and appropriately stored away from work areas, in a manner which is consistent with infection prevention and control principles and guidelines.
- 6.3.3 In the context of an outbreak of an infectious disease, employers must consider employment and shift arrangements which may decrease the risk of infection from the disease. This may include consideration of:
 - 6.3.3.1 Enabling single employer arrangements
 - 6.3.3.2 Cohorting of staff on shifts / teams to reduce the likelihood of significant staff furloughing
 - 6.3.3.3 Allocation of patients to consistent staff members
 - 6.3.3.4 Cohorting of patients in groups of infectious status, taking into consideration need for adequate spatial distancing
- 6.3.4 All employers must develop and implement a Respiratory Protection Program, in accordance with Standards Australia AS/NZS 1715:2009 - Selection, use and maintenance of respiratory protective equipment and Standards Australia AS/NZS 1716:2012 - Respiratory protective devices. This must include education and training, selection of relevant RPE, fit testing and record keeping.

6.4 Supervision

Employers must provide, for nurses, midwives and carers, sufficient supervision as is necessary to undertake their work free from exposure to pathogens. This includes consideration and provision of the following:

- 6.4.1 PPE Spotters
- 6.4.2 Appropriately trained supervisors
- 6.4.3 Provision of nominated Infection Prevention and Control clinical leads at each work site

6.5 Instruction, education & training

Employers must provide, for nurses, midwives and carers, sufficient information, training and instruction as is necessary to undertake work free from exposure to pathogens. This includes consideration and provision of the following:

- 6.5.1 Regular face to face practical training in donning, doffing and safe disposal of PPE.
- 6.5.2 Regular face to face practical training on infection prevention and control principles and practice.
- 6.5.3 Respiratory Prevention Programs.

6.6 Standard precautions

- 6.6.1 Employers must provide, for nurses, midwives and carers, sufficient information, training and instruction as is necessary to implement standard precautions.
- 6.6.2 Employers must provide, for nurses, midwives and carers, sufficient equipment as is necessary to implement standard precautions.

6.7 Equipment

- 6.7.1 Employers must consult with nurses, midwives and carers on the choice of equipment necessary to work free from exposure to pathogens.
- 6.7.2 Employers must ensure there is adequate numbers of equipment are provided as is necessary for nurses, midwives and carers to work free from exposure to pathogens.
- 6.7.3 Employers must ensure nurses, midwives and carers have ready access to equipment.

6.7.4 Employers must ensure there is consideration given to provision of work-provided clothing in circumstance where this will lower the risk of infection.

6.8 Consultation

6.8.1 The participation of and consultation with staff and their representatives, including the ANMF (Vic Branch) and Health & Safety Representatives (HSRs), is critical to the effective implementation of relevant and sustainable policies and procedures and risk control strategies for preventing and managing the risks associated with exposure to pathogens.

6.8.2 Appropriate consultative and representative structures (including HSRs, an agreed safety Issue resolution procedure and OHS Committees) are necessary so as to encourage staff to report injuries/illness and unresolved issues related to exposure to pathogens whilst at work.

6.9 Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs)

The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports involvement of HSRs in prevention of exposure to pathogens through:

6.9.1 Encouraging staff to report all incidents of exposure to pathogens and risks associated with wearing of PPE; eg - skin irritation.

6.9.2 Representation and consultation and with employers.

6.9.3 Health and Safety Committee (HSC) formulation, review and dissemination of plans for prevention of exposure to pathogens.

6.9.4 An agreed Workplace safety issue resolution procedure.

6.9.5 Provisional Improvement Notices (PINs) or requests for WorkSafe Inspectors to attend the workplaces if the employers have not acted to resolve pathogen exposure issues.

6.10 ANMF (Vic Branch) Members

The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports involvement of members in the prevention of exposure to pathogens through:

6.10.1 Reporting issues and incidents relating to exposure, or risks associated with wearing of PPE (eg - skin irritation) to management and HSRs.

6.10.2 Consultation through HSRs on exposure to pathogen control measures.

A nurse or midwife infected with a pathogen has a professional obligation to seek advice regarding their personal care and work practices.

7. ANMF (Vic Branch) commitment

- The ANMF (Vic Branch) will continue to support members and HSRs to prevent and reduce exposure to pathogens in the workplace.
- The ANMF (Vic Branch) will continue to promote and conduct (and support others who wish to conduct) research, training and publicity.

8. Relevant legislation

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017

9. Relevant guidance

- ANMF's (Vic Branch) Occupational Health and Safety Policy
- ANMF's (Federal Office) position statement on immunisation