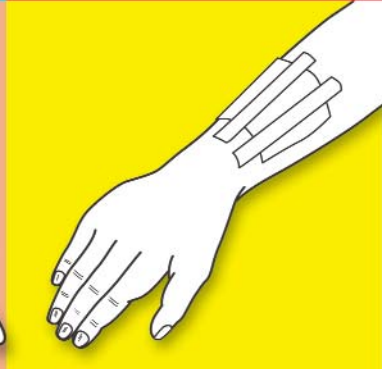




# Guidelines on first aid and HIV/AIDS



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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# Contents

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Introduction	3
Information on HIV/AIDS	4
International Federation's position on HIV/AIDS	5
First aid and HIV/AIDS	6
Basic hygienic measures in first aid	7
Specific areas of concern	8
Barriers to transmission	10
References	12

# Foreword

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The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to devastate communities all over the world. Another 5 million-plus people were infected in 2000 and the impact of the virus on health and socio-economic development in many countries has been huge. The Red Cross and Red Crescent recognises the magnitude of the problem and the need for us all to respond accordingly. It is important for every individual to know how the virus is, and is not, transmitted and how they can prevent transmission and mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS.

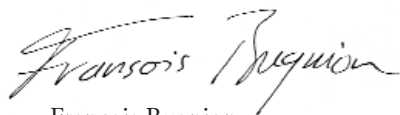
*Guidelines on first aid and HIV/AIDS* addresses the concern of transmission in first aid situations, and provides preventive measures and hygienic practices. First aiders should follow these to reduce the risk of contracting any infection enabling them to continue providing care to everyone without discrimination. Unprotected sexual behaviour and involvement in high risk activities, highlighted in the guidelines, are the major ways of contracting the virus. Being in the front line of everyday health problems, disasters and epidemics, Red Cross and Red Crescent staff members, volunteers and trainers in first aid have the opportunity to provide that *vital link to mobilising the community to fight against HIV/AIDS*. It is your responsibility to protect yourself, and tell others, including friends and family, how to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS.

We hope that these guidelines will prepare you to apply the standards of precautionary and preventive measures while giving first aid. By finding out more about the disease and getting involved in the HIV/AIDS awareness and promotion activities in your community, you can also help others to change their attitude and behaviour by adopting a healthier and safer lifestyle. First aid saves lives and it provides you with an opportunity to make a difference in the fight against HIV/AIDS.



Didier J. Cherpitel

Secretary General of International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



François Bugnion

Director for International Law and Communication  
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# Introduction

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National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are the leading providers and trainers in first aid. Every year, millions of ordinary people – drivers, workers, mothers, youths, etc. – are trained in preventive actions and in providing immediate assistance to save lives and to minimize the impact of injuries. First aiders help in everyday health problems and accidents, and in the aftermath of crises such as conflict or natural disasters.

However, disease transmission in first-aid situations has become an issue of increasing concern to many people, particularly as a result of the AIDS epidemic, but also regarding other transmissible diseases such as hepatitis B and C. It is important to remember that, as yet, there has never been a single case reported of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, being transmitted while giving first aid.

This booklet, *Guidelines on first aid and HIV/AIDS*, aims at better informing you about HIV/AIDS and how the virus is, and is not, transmitted and at outlining the practical steps and preventive measures you can take in first-aid situations to protect yourselves and others. The guidelines emphasize the fact that, as long as adequate precautions are taken, the risk of transmission is exceedingly slight, and fear of contracting HIV and other viruses should not deter trained first aiders from helping anyone in need.

We hope that you will find these guidelines useful and will be prepared and encouraged to provide first aid to anyone in need without discrimination.

# Guidelines on first aid and HIV/AIDS

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In first-aid situations, many people are worried about disease transmission. This concern has increased as a result of the AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) epidemic. AIDS is caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) which breaks down the body's immune system and can lead to fatal infections. People can carry the HIV virus for more than eight years without developing AIDS but, during that time, they can still infect others.

The risk of catching any transmissible diseases, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV, etc., when giving first aid is far less than people think. And this risk is further reduced by taking appropriate precautions and applying basic hygienic measures.

## Information on HIV/AIDS

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### Ways in which HIV is transmitted

- through blood and blood products, other body fluids and transplanted organs that contain the virus
- from an HIV-infected mother to her child during pregnancy, childbirth or through breastfeeding.
- through unprotected sexual intercourse with someone who has HIV (man to woman, woman to man, man to man)

You not only have the responsibility to protect yourself, but also to tell others how to avoid HIV infection. You can do this by:

- making sure needles, syringes or other instruments are sterile if skin is to be pierced or cut;
- ensuring injection needles and syringes are never shared;
- making sure that only safe blood, which has been tested for HIV, is used for transfusion;
- choosing abstinence – no sex is safest!

- insisting on safer sex through the use of condoms.

*It is your responsibility to protect yourself and others by taking preventive measures and reducing risks*

## Ways in which HIV is **not** transmitted

- giving first aid when good safety practices are followed;
- contact of blood or other body fluids on unbroken skin;
- giving blood if you are not HIV-positive;
- caring for someone with HIV/AIDS when appropriate precautions are taken;
- touching, hugging and shaking hands;
- mosquitoes or any other biting insects;
- coughing and sneezing;
- food and water;
- air;
- toilet seats;
- sharing clothes and bedding;
- swimming with a person who has HIV/AIDS.

## International Federation's position on HIV/AIDS

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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' position on HIV/AIDS<sup>1</sup> is guided by the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The position advocates:

- providing humanitarian support without discrimination to people with HIV/AIDS; and
- mobilizing volunteers to work with governments and other organizations in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

*First aid saves lives. Give first aid to anyone in need without discrimination and treat them all with respect.*

# First aid and HIV/AIDS

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By December 2000, more than 57 million people have been infected by HIV and over 36 millions are living with HIV/AIDS. It is important to remember that, as yet, no cases of transmission during first aid have ever been reported. Some studies have shown, however, that there is a risk of transmission of disease during exposure to blood, saliva and other body fluids, but this risk is reduced if you are prepared for emergencies at all times. You should, therefore, always follow high standards of precaution and preventive measures.

## Don't forget

- People who are HIV positive can remain healthy for a long time before they develop AIDS. But they can still infect others, so do not try to guess who might be infected.
- People living with HIV/AIDS have the right to receive first aid without discrimination.
- Concern about infection can work both ways – transmission from the injured person to the first aider or from the first aider to the injured person.
- Once outside the body HIV is fragile and does not survive for long.
- Unbroken skin is a good barrier to prevent direct contact with HIV. The virus cannot get through unbroken skin.

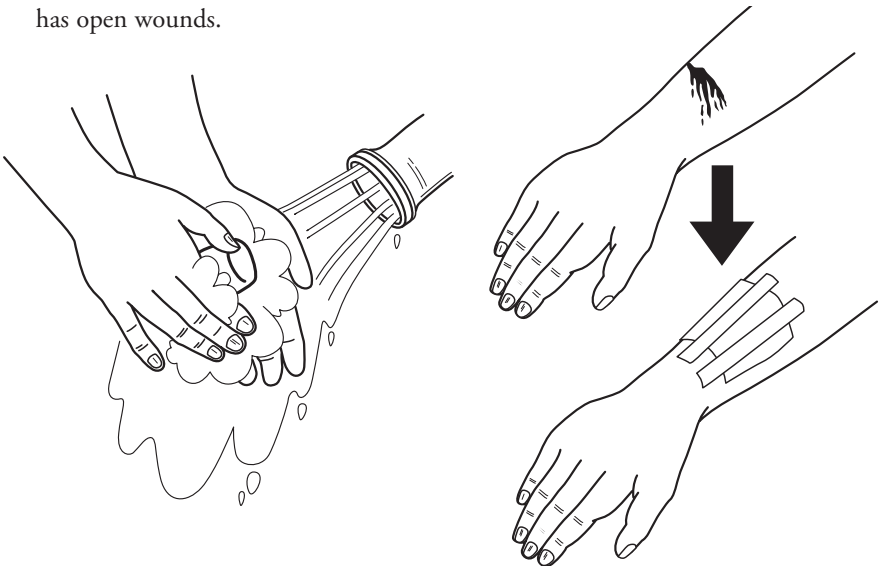
*Follow high standards of precaution  
and preventive measures at all times*

## Guidelines on first aid and HIV/AIDS

The first set of *Guidelines on first aid and HIV/AIDS* was developed in collaboration with the World Health Organization for the first-aid teams of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.<sup>2</sup> These guidelines strengthen existing national regulations. They should be applied in accordance with country and local-level procedures, such as those governing the management of contaminated wastes.

# Basic hygienic measures in first aid

- Wash your hands with soap and water before and immediately after giving first aid. If gloves are available for use in first-aid situations, you should also wash your hands well before putting them on and after disposing of them.
- Avoid contact with body fluids when possible. Do not touch objects that may be soiled with blood or other body fluids. Be particularly attentive and take precautionary measures, especially the use of gloves, if you have to provide first aid in situations where there are mass casualties or fighting.
- Be careful not to prick yourself with broken glass or any sharp objects found on or near the injured person.
- Prevent injuries when using, handling, cleaning or disposing of sharp instruments or devices.
- Cover cuts or other skin breaks with dry and clean dressings.
- Chronic skin conditions may cause open sores on hands. People with these conditions should avoid direct contact with any injured person who is bleeding or has open wounds.



*Wash your hands with soap and water before  
AND immediately after giving first aid*

# Specific areas of concern

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## 1. Giving mouth-to-mouth ventilation (also called mouth-to-mouth breathing)

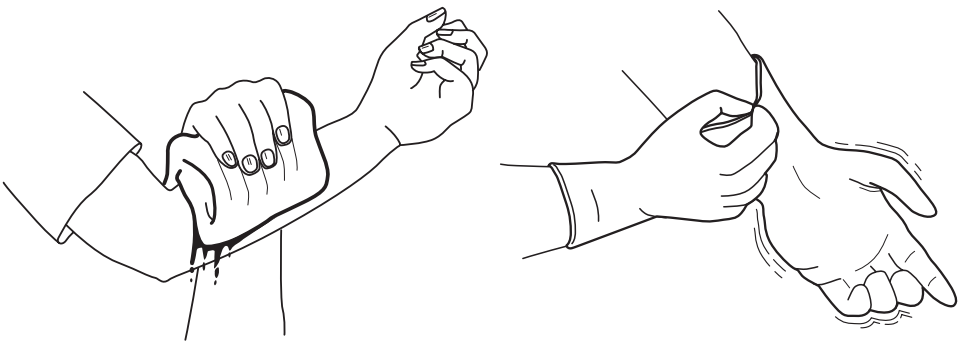
This lifesaving procedure should not be withheld through fear of contracting HIV or other infections. There are no reported cases of HIV transmission from mouth-to-mouth ventilation, but if the injured person is bleeding from the mouth or the first aider has open mouth-sores, direct contact with blood should be avoided.

- Use a clean cloth or handkerchief, if available, to wipe away any blood from the injured person's mouth and to ensure clear airways.
- Learn how to use simple face shields or pocket masks during mouth-to-mouth ventilation. If possible, first-aid kits should contain such shields or masks, or the first aiders should carry their own.

*The absence of face shields or pocket masks should NOT be a reason to withhold mouth-to-mouth ventilation*

## 2. Dealing with someone who is bleeding

Bleeding can be life threatening. A person losing blood needs first aid to stop the bleeding.



- If possible, instruct the injured person that he/she can stop the bleeding by applying direct pressure to the wound himself/herself.
- If the injured person cannot stop the bleeding for any reason, you can use clean, thick cloth, clothing or any other suitable material as a barrier to stop the bleeding and to

avoid direct contact with the blood. When this compressive bandage is not efficient or possible, apply proximal pressure on the main artery.

- If you have gloves with you, wear them, especially in case of mass casualties or fighting.

*Basic hygiene, a few simple precautions  
and good common sense are needed in first aid  
to reduce the risk of catching transmissible diseases*

### **3. Being in contact with the injured person's blood**

- If your hands are contaminated with blood, wash them thoroughly with soap as soon as possible.
- If another part of your body is splashed or contaminated by blood or body fluids, especially the eyes, wash or flush it with lots of water.
- If your skin is cut by any object that is contaminated with blood, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and apply a dry and clean dressing.

*If you are worried that you have been in contact  
with any kind of infection,  
seek confidential medical advice, counselling and testing*

### **4. Cleaning up blood spills**

- Spilt blood should be soaked up with absorbent materials such as a cloths, rags, paper towels or sawdust. These materials should be considered as contaminated waste and be put in plastic bags for disposal, or burnt or buried.
- The area contaminated with blood should then be washed with a disinfectant (preferably sodium hypo-chlorite – household bleach – diluted 1:10 with water to give 0.1-0.5 per cent concentration) to clean the area.<sup>1</sup> Wait for 10 to 15 minutes before rinsing the contaminated area.
- Wear general-purpose utility gloves, thick rubber household gloves or two pairs of ordinary gloves to avoid contact with blood when cleaning the contaminated area. Put the gloves in a plastic bag for disposal after use.
- If gloves are not available, use other suitable materials to avoid direct contact with the blood.

<sup>1</sup> Another alternative disinfectant is sodium dichloroisocyanurate or NaDCC, used at 0.2-0.5 per cent concentration.



*You should always wash your hands with soap and water after cleaning up blood or other body fluids*

## **5. Cleaning materials contaminated with blood**

Cloths or clothing that are contaminated with blood should be handled with great care.

- Wear general-purpose utility gloves or thick rubber household gloves if you have to handle contaminated cloths or clothing, which should then be disposed of properly, burnt or buried.
- If contaminated cloths or clothing need to be washed, use detergent and hot water (at least 70 degrees Celsius) and soak for at least 25 minutes, or use cooler water with a detergent suitable for cold-water washing.

*Materials contaminated with blood should be handled with great care*

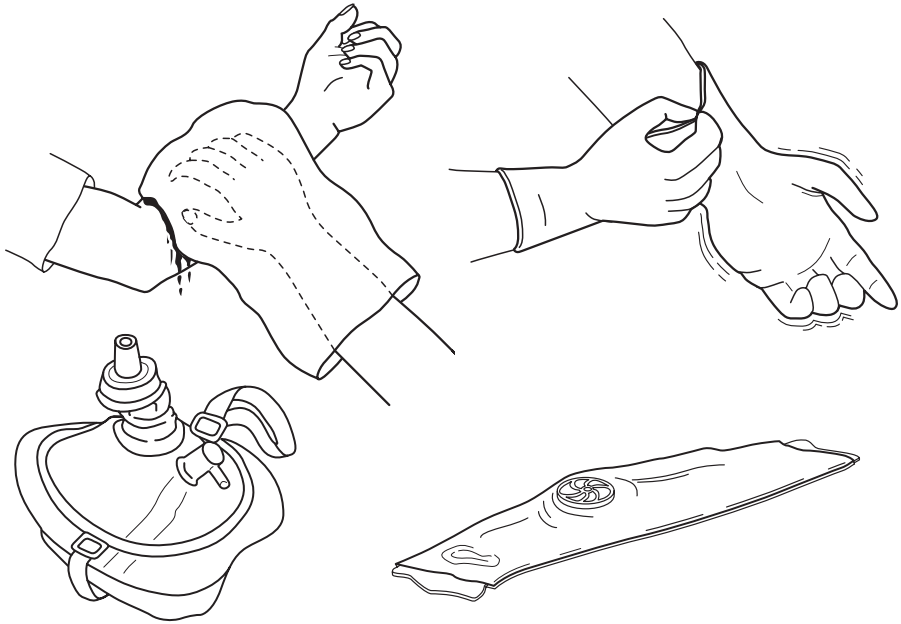
## **Barriers to transmission**

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To minimize the risk of disease transmission, various types of barriers and shields have been developed for use by first aiders and they should be included in first-aid kits. You should learn how to use these barriers.

- Gloves can be used and disposed of after use.
- Face shields or pocket masks can be used in mouth-to-mouth ventilation.
- Plastic bags can be used as gloves for protection and for collecting any soiled material.

- Thick cloth, clothing or any other suitable material can also be used as a barrier to avoid contact with body fluids.



*Unbroken skin is a good barrier to prevent infection. But the absence of barriers is NOT a reason to refuse to give first aid*

## What you can do

High standards of precautionary and safe practices are essential at all times to prevent the remote risk of contracting HIV/AIDS by giving first aid. The chances of contracting HIV/AIDS are much reduced if you have safe sex or are not involved in other high-risk activities as described above (see “Ways in which HIV is transmitted”)

*Protect yourself and tell others, including friends and family, how to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS*

# References

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- <sup>1</sup> HIV/AIDS advocacy position paper adopted by the Governing Board of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> World Health Organization (WHO). *Guidelines on AIDS and First Aid in the Workplace*. Geneva: WHO AIDS Series, No. 7, 1990.

## Web sites

### **UNAIDS (<http://www.unaids.org>)**

It includes up-to-date information on the spread of the pandemic, by country. News and current events about AIDS.

### **International Federation (<http://www.ifrc.org>)**

The International Federation's site includes information about International Federation activities and links to national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies' sites.

### **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (<http://www.icrc.org>)**

Information about ICRC activities

# Fundamental Principles

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**Humanity:** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality:** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality:** In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence:** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary Service:** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity:** There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality:** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



*The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people.*

By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



The International Committee of the Red Cross is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.