

From the Chief Medical Officer:  
Dr Henrietta Campbell CB

**HSS(MD)17/2005**

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Date: 13 May 2005

Dear Colleague

**‘TRANSMISSIBLE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY AGENTS: SAFE WORKING AND THE PREVENTION OF INFECTION’: PUBLICATION OF REVISED GUIDANCE - UPDATE**

I am writing to let you know that the above guidance for healthcare and laboratory workers on safe working with TSEs such as CJD and BSE has been updated and published on the Department of Health's website at: <http://www.advisorybodies.doh.gov.uk/acdp/tseguidance/>. (I understand that there are no plans to issue the guidance in hard copy). This circular updates the information provided in circular HSS(MD)36/2003 dated 13 August 2003.

The updated sections are the latest tranche in the evolving revision of the previous (1998) document. The guidance has been revised by a sub-group of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) TSE Working Group.

The revised guidance includes the following:

- a new Annex A2 entitled “Distribution of infectivity in animal tissues and body fluids” and

- a revised Annex F “Decontamination of endoscopes”.

It is important that everybody and especially employers who are responsible for the management of work which may pose a risk of exposure to the TSE agent read this updated guidance.

## **ANNEX F: ENDOSCOPIC DECONTAMINATION**

Guidance on the decontamination of endoscopes in Annex F was published in December 2003. However, based upon a further review of the evidence of the risks posed by endoscopy, a key recommendation in the revised guidance is that for those falling into the ‘at risk’ group of patients, endoscopy of the gastro- intestinal tract **not involving biopsy or other invasive procedure** can be regarded as posing ‘low risk’ and therefore endoscopes used in such procedures will not, in future, need to be ‘quarantined’ after use. This will have practical implications for the HPSS in relation to key groups of patients in the ‘at risk’ category as described in my previous correspondence entitled “Variant **Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease** (vCJD) and Plasma Proteins” (HSS(MD)29-2004) <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/publications/2004/hssmd29-2004.pdf>. Such patients include those who may have received vCJD-contaminated plasma products and who need to undergo routine endoscopic investigation.

You should note that endoscopes used in procedures involving biopsy or other invasive procedures in patients ‘at risk’ for vCJD still require to be quarantined pending further assessment (see para F.22).

## **ACTION REQUIRED**

I should be grateful if you would alert relevant staff within your authority or organisation to this publication, specifically those with responsibility for infection control and those responsible for the re-processing of medical devices (including endoscopes). The guidance is also relevant to pathologists and others working with human and animal TSEs in the laboratory including those working with diagnostic specimens (potentially) infected with TSEs.

## **CONTENT OF THE GUIDANCE**

The revised guidance is being published in sections as they are prepared by ACDP. Publishing in this way facilitates easier updating of individual sections as further scientific information becomes available or future policy decisions need to be reflected. This new version includes a new Annex A.2 “Distribution of infectivity in animal tissues and body fluids” and a revised Annex F “Decontamination of endoscopes”.

The revised guidance as a whole comprises 4 main parts:

- Part 1 – an introductory section;
- Part 2 – Health and Safety management of TSEs;
- Part 3 – Laboratory containment and control measures; and
- Part 4 – Infection control of CJD and related disorders in the healthcare setting;

together with a number of separate Annexes:

- Annex A – Distribution of TSE infectivity in tissues and body fluids (with separate information on human and animal tissues and body fluids);
- Annex B – Diagnostic criteria;
- Annex C – Decontamination and waste disposal;
- Annex D – Transport of TSE-infected material;
- Annex E – Quarantining of surgical instruments;
- Annex F – Decontamination of endoscopes;
- Annex G – Decontamination of other specialised equipment; and
- Annex H – After death.

The review of Annex G is still in progress and will complete the review of the current guidance.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Queries concerning this letter should be addressed to Dr Elizabeth Mitchell (Tel: 028 9052 0716), DHSSPS, Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3SQ.

This letter is available at [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk) and also on the DHSSPS Extranet which can be accessed directly at <http://extranet.dhsspsni.gov.uk> or by going through the HPSS web at <http://www.n-i.nhs.uk> and clicking on DHSSPS.

Yours sincerely



**pp/ HENRIETTA CAMPBELL**  
**Chief Medical Officer**

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