


HEALTH IN CUSTODIAL SETTINGS

INFORMATION
for inmates

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HEALTH

When people are serving a prison sentence, health is an important issue. Infectious diseases, stress, and personal problems such as the effects of being separated from your family, friends and colleagues can all take their toll on your health. Below you will find a few suggestions of steps you can take to look after yourself and your health.



Exercise as much as possible

Physical fitness not only benefits your muscles, but can also help to reduce stress. People who are physically fit are less susceptible to illness and they are also less affected by stress. Physical exercise also has a beneficial effect on people's mental health and improves sleep. Exercise can help to combat anxiety and depression.

- **What sport or exercise opportunities are available to me in prison?**
- **How do I take advantage of these opportunities?**
- **How do I feel after a sporting activity?**



Question your own habits

If you smoke, have questions about your alcohol consumption, want to stop taking drugs or need treatment, there is support available to you in prison.

- **Do I want to change something?**
- **What could my goal be?**
- **Do I know what support is available to me in prison?**



Eat healthily

A balanced diet is essential to keep our bodies healthy and to be able to ward off illnesses. It is just as important that we drink enough fluids. Tap water is perfectly safe to drink.

- **Do I eat enough fruit and vegetables?**
- **Do I drink enough each day (1.5 litres)?**



Do something positive

Find out about the work and leisure activities and the courses which are available to you.

- **What do I enjoy? (e.g. reading, sport, music, handicraft, etc.)**
- **Do I want to learn something new?**
- **Do I know what's on offer in prison?**



Confide in somebody

If you have worries or problems that are getting you down, it sometimes helps to talk to somebody about them. In prison, there are a number of people who are available to help:

- The health service or prison doctor
- Prison staff
- Social services
- Pastoral care providers
- Fellow inmates

Prison staff have a duty of confidentiality. This means that they are not allowed to pass on anything you tell them to anybody outside their area of work.

- **Who can offer me support in prison?**
- **Who do I trust enough to discuss personal issues?**
- **What opportunities are available to me to have a private conversation?**



Maintain good personal hygiene standards

Good personal hygiene helps to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Personal hygiene includes looking after your body, changing your clothing regularly and changing your bed linen.

- **When it comes to looking after my body, what's important to me?**
- **What opportunities are available to me for looking after my body?**
- **Do I know the options available to me for changing bed linen?**



Find out about infectious diseases

In prisons, there are many people living together in a confined space. Infectious diseases can therefore spread more easily than in the general community. However, many people have been given the wrong information or no information at all, and therefore worry about the risk of infection in situations where there is absolutely no risk whatsoever. Unfounded fears can make living together with others very difficult. The correct information helps to dispel fears and helps people to take the right steps to minimise the risk of infection.

- **What do I know about infectious diseases?**
 - **What situations worry me?**
 - **Who can I turn to if I have questions?**
-

Protecting yourself against infectious diseases:



Ask about possible immunisations

The health service or doctor can provide you with information about whether you can or should be immunised against flu and hepatitis A and B.

- **Protection against diseases which can be prevented by immunisation**
-



Ask about possible tests for HIV / AIDS, hepatitis and tuberculosis

The health service or doctor can provide you with information about whether you can or should be tested for HIV, hepatitis or tuberculosis.

- **Protection against a disease progressing unnoticed**
-



Wash your hands regularly with soap

- Before eating
- When cooking or handling food
- After every time you use the toilet
- In general when your hands are dirty

- **Protection against diseases which are transmitted by hand contact**
-



Cough or sneeze into a paper tissue

- When you cough or sneeze, hold a paper tissue in front of your mouth. Once you have used the tissue, put it in the bin
- If you have no paper tissue available, cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm

- **Protection against diseases which are transmitted by the respiratory route**
-



Only use your own personal hygiene items

Never lend personal hygiene items to anybody else

- Toothbrushes
- Shaving equipment
- Nail scissors, nail clippers
- Hand and bath towels
- Hair clippers

- **Protection against diseases which are transmitted through contact, with or without blood**
-



Avoid contact with blood

- Always put on gloves before touching open or bleeding wounds on other people (however, if no gloves are available, you should still perform first aid and wash your hands once the emergency is over)
 - Cover open wounds with a plaster or another dressing
 - **Protection against diseases which are transmitted through contact with blood**
-



Follow the Safer Sex rules

- Always use a condom or femidom for sexual intercourse involving penetration (vaginal, anal or oral)
 - Avoid sperm in the mouth; do not swallow sperm
 - Avoid menstrual blood in the mouth; do not swallow menstrual blood
 - Tell the doctor if you experience any itching, burning or discharge
 - **Protection against sexually transmitted infections**
-



If you take drugs, talk to the health service

- Ask whether drug replacement therapy is an option
 - Ask how you can get hold of clean needles and syringes
 - Ask how you can dispose of needles and syringes safely
 - **Protection against diseases which are transmitted through contact with blood**
-



Use your own drug materials and never lend these to anybody else

- Only use your own equipment or new, clean needles and syringes, and never lend these to anybody else
 - If sniffing drugs, use your own materials and never lend these to anybody else
 - **Protection against diseases which are transmitted through contact with blood**
-



Use your own tattooing materials and never lend these to anybody else

- Use tattooing needles or similar items for one person only
 - **Protection against diseases which are transmitted through contact with blood**
-



Report any symptoms of disease to the health service or doctor

- High temperature
 - Persistent cough and coughing up blood
 - Chest pain
 - Unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite
 - Exhaustion, persistent fatigue
 - Skin rashes
 - Pain when passing urine
 - Discharge from the vagina or penis
 - Pain during sexual intercourse
 - Itching or pain in the genital region
 - Wounds in the genital region
-



**DISEASES WHICH
ARE TRANSMITTED BY THE
RESPIRATORY ROUTE**



TUBERCULOSIS

Tuberculosis is a bacterial disease which is transmitted by the respiratory route.

Means of protection against infection:

- Ask about the possibility of a test for tuberculosis

- Cough or sneeze into a paper tissue

- Ventilate rooms well and regularly

- Ask about the possibility of immunisation against tuberculosis
Ask the health service or doctor whether an immunization is possible or necessary

- Report any symptoms of disease to the health service or doctor:
If you experience a cough, coughing up blood, a temperature, loss of appetite and unexplained weight loss, report these symptoms to the health service or doctor immediately

Situations which pose no risk:

No risk of infection is posed by contact with people suffering from tuberculosis if they have been receiving treatment with drugs for the disease for several weeks.

Treatment:

Tuberculosis is treated with antibiotics and can be cured. Treatment generally lasts for six months and can be carried out in prisons.

FLU

Flu is a viral infection which is most prevalent in winter. It is transmitted by the respiratory route.

Means of protection against infection:

- Cough or sneeze into a paper tissue

- Wash your hands regularly with soap

- Ask about possible immunisations against flu:
Ask the health service or doctor whether an immunisation is possible or necessary

- Report any symptoms of disease to the health service or doctor:
If you experience a sudden high temperature, aching limbs or a headache, report these symptoms to the health service or doctor

Situations which pose no risk:

Infection can be avoided by consistently applying the hygiene rules.

Treatment:

Flu symptoms (temperature, aches) are treated with drugs (analgesics and drugs to reduce temperature, not antibiotics). These drugs are available in prisons.



**DISEASES WHICH ARE
TRANSMITTED THROUGH
SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
AND CONTACT WITH BLOOD**



HIV / AIDS

HIV is a virus which is transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse and unprotected contact with blood. The virus can also be transmitted by a mother to her child through pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.

HIV attacks the human immune system. AIDS is the end stage of the disease. At this stage, the immune system is barely able to function and the body can no longer fight off diseases – for example, flu or a harmless bladder infection can prove serious and can result in blood poisoning. Without treatment, the disease is fatal. The virus remains in the body for life, but drugs can keep it under control, i.e. the disease can be treated but not cured. Anybody who is infected with the virus can pass it on to others.

Means of protection against infection:

→ **Follow the Safer Sex rules (see page 8)**

→ **Avoid contact with blood**

→ **Only use your own personal hygiene items and never lend these to anybody else**

→ **Use your own drug equipment and never lend it to anybody else**

→ **If sniffing drugs, use your own materials and never lend these to anybody else**

→ **Use your own tattooing materials and never lend these to anybody else**

→ **Ask about a possible HIV test:**

Speak to the health service or doctor if you are concerned because you have had unprotected sexual intercourse in the past or have come into unprotected contact with blood

Situations which pose no risk:

- Shaking hands, hugging, caressing or kissing
- Coughing or sneezing
- Eating or drinking from the same utensils or using the same cutlery
- Using communal toilets or washroom facilities
- In the swimming pool

Treatment:

HIV / AIDS is treated with antiretroviral drugs. The drugs must be taken for life. Treatment is available in prisons.



HEPATITIS B AND C

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver caused by viruses.

Hepatitis B and hepatitis C are transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse or through unprotected contact with blood.

Means of protection against infection:

- **Avoid contact with blood**

- **Follow the Safer Sex rules (see page 8)**

- **Only use your own personal hygiene items and never lend these to anybody else**

- **Use your own drug equipment and never lend it to anybody else**

- **If sniffing drugs, use your own materials and never lend these to anybody else**

- **Use your own tattooing materials and never lend these to anybody else**

- **Ask about the possibility of immunisation against hepatitis B:**
Ask the health service or doctor whether an immunisation is possible or necessary

Situations which pose no risk:

- Shaking hands, hugging, caressing or kissing
- Coughing or sneezing
- Eating or drinking from the same utensils or using the same cutlery
- Using communal toilets or washroom facilities
- In the swimming pool

Treatment:

Certain forms of hepatitis B and C can be treated with antiviral drugs.
Treatment lasts for a few months to up to a year. Treatment is available in prisons.

GONORRHOEA («THE CLAP») AND CHLAMYDIA

Gonorrhoea is a disease which is transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse. It can lead to infertility.

Chlamydia are bacteria which are transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse. An untreated chlamydia infection can lead to infertility.

Means of protection against infection:

- **Follow the Safer Sex rules (see page 8)**

- **Report any symptoms of disease to the health service or doctor:**
If you experience burning or itching when passing urine, discharge from the penis or vagina or pain in the lower abdomen, report these symptoms to the health service or prison doctor

Situations which pose no risk:

- Shaking hands, hugging, caressing or kissing
- Using communal toilets or washroom facilities
- In the swimming pool

Treatment:

Gonorrhoea and chlamydia are treated with antibiotics. Treatment is available in prisons.

Your partner should always be treated at the same time.



SYPHILIS

Syphilis is transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse, unprotected contact with blood and kissing. Syphilis is highly infectious. If left untreated, syphilis causes damage to blood vessels, internal organs, the brain and the nervous system.

Means of protection against infection:

- Follow the Safer Sex rules (see page 8)

- Avoid contact with blood

- Only use your own personal hygiene items and never lend these to anybody else

- Use your own drug equipment and never lend it to anybody else

- If sniffing drugs, use your own materials and never lend these to anybody else

- Use your own tattooing materials and never lend these to anybody else

- Syphilis can also be transmitted by kissing. Used cutlery and utensils (glasses, cups etc.) should not be shared.

- Report any symptoms of disease to the health service or doctor:
If you notice a nodule or wound in the genital region, report this to the health service or prison doctor

Situations which pose no risk:

- Shaking hands, hugging or caressing
- Using communal toilets or washroom facilities
- In the swimming pool

Treatment:

Syphilis is treated with antibiotics. Treatment is accessible in prisons.

Your partner should always be treated at the same time.

GENITAL WARTS (HPV)

Genital warts are transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse.

Means of protection against infection:

- Follow the Safer Sex rules (see page 8)

- Report any symptoms of disease to the health service or doctor:
If you notice any warts in the vaginal region, under the foreskin of the penis or around the anus, report these symptoms to the health service or prison doctor

Situations which pose no risk:

- Shaking hands, hugging, caressing or kissing
- Using communal toilets or washroom facilities
- In the swimming pool

Treatment:

There are various ways of treating genital warts. Treatment is accessible in prisons.

Your partner should always be treated at the same time.



**DISEASES WHICH ARE
TRANSMITTED AS A RESULT
OF POOR HYGIENE**

HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver caused by viruses.

Hepatitis A is transmitted by eating contaminated food, drinking contaminated water or as a result of poor hand hygiene.

Means of protection against infection:

→ Wash your hands regularly with soap: after going to the toilet and before eating, cooking or handling food, etc.

→ Ask about the possibility of immunisation against hepatitis A:
Ask the health service or prison doctor whether an immunisation is possible or necessary

Situations which pose no risk:

– There is no risk of infection if the abovementioned hygiene rules are consistently applied

Treatment:

Hepatitis A usually clears up without treatment.



FIRST AID



FIRST AID FOR EPILEPTIC SEIZURES

What action to take?

1. Keep calm, perform first aid and alert the prison staff as soon as possible

2. Place the affected person on the floor, bed or similar in order to prevent injuries

3. Protect the affected person's head, possibly by placing a cushion or pillow underneath it or holding it steady

4. Remove any dangerous objects:
 - remove any pointed, sharp, hard or hot items which are near the affected person or take these out of their hands (tools etc.)
 - remove glasses if applicable

5. If necessary, pull the affected person out of the danger zone (e.g. stair landing, fireplace, etc.). Pull the person by the trunk or upper body

6. As soon as the seizure is over, place the affected person on his or her side in the recovery position

7. Loosen clothing to make breathing easier

8. Report the epileptic seizure to the health service or prison doctor
→ **Stay with the affected person until the seizure is over**



Do not, under any circumstances ...

- ... **hold the affected person's teeth apart or insert anything between the upper and lower jaws (risk of injury to teeth and fingers)**
- ... talk to, shout at, shake or hit the affected person
- ... hold the affected person during and, particularly, after the seizure (increases the risk of injury)
- ... give the affected person anything to drink, antiepileptic drugs or any other drugs (risk of choking)
- ... wake up the affected person in the post-seizure sleep phase or attempt to «activate» him or her in any other way (risk of choking)

FIRST AID FOR MINOR WOUNDS

Grazes, cuts, lacerations and bruises

1. Perform first aid and alert the prison staff as soon as possible

2. Wash your hands, using a solution containing alcohol if possible

3. Wear gloves (however, if no gloves are available, you should still perform first aid and wash your hands once the emergency is over)

4. Be careful not to breathe, cough or sneeze on the wound

5. Dry the wound using sterile material

6. Carefully dab a suitable antiseptic onto the wound

7. Apply a plaster or, in the case of larger wounds, apply sterile, non-adhesive compresses to the wound and secure them in place

8. Monitor the wound: if there is persistent bleeding or if there are signs of infection, or impaired sensitivity or motor function (infection: red with excessive heat; impaired sensitivity: lack of sensation; impaired motor function: lack of mobility), report this to the health service or prison doctor

9. Wash your hands following contact with blood and/or secretions

FIRST AID FOR SEVERE BLEEDING

1. Perform first aid and alert the prison staff as soon as possible

2. Put on gloves (however, if no gloves are available, you should still perform first aid and wash your hands once the emergency is over)

3. Lay the affected person flat

4. Hold the injured part of the body in an elevated position

5. Apply counter-pressure on the wound using an absorbent material
Materials:
 - Towel
 - Piece of material
 - Triangular bandage
 - Bandage roll

6. Apply a compression bandage:
 - Leave the material listed under point 5 on the wound
 - Apply pressure on the wound and do not release; knot the bandage on the wound
 - If the bleeding cannot be stopped, apply another dressing directly

7. Alert the health service or prison doctor

8. Wash your hands following contact with blood and/or secretions



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

HIV / Aids and sexually transmitted infections

Swiss AIDS Federation

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Postfach 1118
CH-8031 Zurich
Tel. +41 (0)44 447 11 11
www.aids.ch

Infectious diseases, HIV / Aids and alcohol, tobacco and drugs

Federal Office of Public Health

Federal Office of Public Health
CH-3003 Bern
Tel. +41 (0)58 463 87 06
www.bag.admin.ch

Tuberculosis

Lungenliga Schweiz

Chutzenstrasse 10
CH-3007 Bern
Tel. +41 (0)31 378 20 50
www.lung.ch

Health information in various languages

Swiss Red Cross

Department of Health and Integration
Werkstrasse 18
CH-3084 Wabern
Tel. +41 (0)31 960 75 75
www.migesplus.ch – Health information on a range of topics in various languages
