



Department of Dental Hygiene Policy on Bloodborne Pathogens

The BridgeValley Department of Dental Hygiene Policy on Bloodborne Pathogens is modeled after the policy statement published by the American Dental Association addressing the multiple and varied issues associated with patients and practitioners exposed to, or infected with, bloodborne pathogens.

The BridgeValley Department of Dental Hygiene clinic facility is considered a safe place to provide and receive dental hygiene care. Current and generally accepted epidemiological information supports the conclusion that there is no significant risk of contracting bloodborne diseases through the provision of dental treatment when appropriate infection control procedures are followed.

In general, a key element of infection control is the concept of *standard precautions*, introduced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a means to reduce the risk of bloodborne pathogen transmission (e.g., the Human Immunodeficiency Virus [HIV], Hepatitis B Virus [HBV] and others) in healthcare settings. The primary principle behind standard precautions centers on the premise that medical history and examination cannot reliably identify all patients infected with bloodborne pathogens. All patients, therefore, must be regarded as potentially infectious. As such, applying standard precautions requires that infection control procedures (e.g., HBV vaccination, routine handwashing, use of protective barriers and care in the use and disposal of needles and other sharp instruments) are used for every patient.

The program adheres to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Guidelines and complies with all tenets of the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens standard in each patient care encounter. In addition to implementation of these guidelines and standards it is necessary to specifically outline certain procedures and policies related to applicants, patients and practitioners. In addition to this policy more detailed information regarding clinical procedures for prevention of disease transmission in the clinical and laboratory setting is provided in the *BridgeValley Dental Hygiene Policies and Procedures Manual*. Both the Policy on Bloodborne Pathogens and the Infection Control Policy are reviewed annually and revised as necessary.

The Policy of Bloodborne Pathogens is made available to all prospective students, patients and employees through the college catalog via the website, www.bridgevalley.edu as well as posting in the reception area, inclusion in the *BridgeValley Dental Hygiene Policies and Procedures Manual* and review during clinical orientations.

Prospective Student/Employee Issues

Anti-discrimination: The program does not discriminate against applicants for admission to the dental hygiene program or those seeking employment based upon health status. Applicants and potential employees who test positive for an infectious disease prior to entering or being employed by the program should seek counsel from their personal physician and the program director regarding future career planning or job placement.

Environmental Hazards: The dental hygiene clinic environment inherently presents with the following hazards in addition to exposure to bloodborne pathogens: musculoskeletal repetitive stress disorders,

exposure to high decibel sounds, exposure to hazardous chemicals, accidental injury, exposure to radiation and other agents or substances prone to sensitivity or allergy in certain persons.

Patient Issues

Access to Care: The dental hygiene program believes that individuals infected with a bloodborne pathogen(s) should be treated with compassion and dignity and should have access to dental treatment. Treatment considerations should be based on current and generally accepted scientific knowledge. A decision not to provide treatment to an individual based solely on the fact that the individual is infected with a bloodborne pathogen is unethical as referenced in the *American Dental Hygienists Association Code of Ethics*.

Infection Control: Current epidemiological evidence indicates that there is no significant risk of contracting bloodborne diseases through the provision of dental treatment when standard precautions are routinely followed. The practice of standard precautions is an effective means of reducing blood contacts that can result in bloodborne pathogen transmission, minimizing even further the already low risk of disease transmission in the dental office. The infection control policy for the program is published in the *BridgeValley Dental Hygiene Policies and Procedures Manual*.

Patient Disclosure: The dental hygiene program believes that all patients infected with a bloodborne pathogen(s) should disclose their bloodborne pathogen status as part of their health history; dental hygienists and dentists, like physicians, need to know every patient's medical history in order to make appropriate treatment decisions that are in the best interests of the patient. Responsibility for reporting is included in the Patient's Responsibilities section of the Patient's Rights statement signed by patients before treatment begins.

Referral for Medical Evaluation: Faculty and students should be alert to signs and symptoms of bloodborne disease that may be identified during the provision of dental care. Patients with medical histories or conditions possibly indicative of infection should be referred to their physicians for diagnostic procedures, counseling and medical follow-up.

Professional Judgment: The program relies on the expertise of faculty members to exercise his or her best professional judgment, based on current and generally accepted scientific knowledge and the ethics of the profession, in all situations regarding when and how to treat and whether to refer each patient.

Confidentiality: The program requires all faculty, staff and students to maintain strict confidentiality of a patient's bloodborne pathogen status and all medical conditions. HIPAA policies, Professional Responsibility standards, ADHA Code of Ethics and Confidentiality statements are included in the *BridgeValley Dental Hygiene Policies and Procedures Manual*. Students and faculty must sign a confidentiality agreement at the beginning of each semester.

Faculty/Student Issues

Practice Restrictions/Disclosure: The dental hygiene program affirms that dentists and dental hygienists infected with bloodborne pathogens can safely provide dental care, and that bloodborne pathogen infection alone does not justify the limiting of professional duties or automatically mandate disclosure provided proper infection control procedures are implemented.

The program strongly encourages all faculty and students to undergo personal evaluation and assess their need to determine their bloodborne pathogen status. Furthermore, faculty and students who believe they are at risk for bloodborne pathogen infection should regularly monitor their status.

If the student or faculty member determines that a medical condition poses a risk to others, the program director, in coordination with the student or faculty member and their personal physician, will determine future course of action.

Infected dental health care workers must practice in compliance with CDC or equivalent infection-control recommendations, as required by applicable law.

Infection Control: Current epidemiological evidence indicates that there is no significant risk of contracting bloodborne diseases through the provision of dental treatment when standard precautions and recommended infection control procedures are routinely followed. Practicing standard precautions is an effective means of reducing blood contacts that can result in bloodborne pathogen transmission, minimizing even further the already low risk of disease transmission in the dental office.

The infection control policy for the program is published in the *BridgeValley Dental Hygiene Policies and Procedures Manual*.

Immunizations/Health Evaluation: The dental hygiene program requires all students and faculty who may be at reasonable risk for infection to take advantage of the hepatitis B vaccine, and other recommended vaccines, to protect themselves and patients from infectious organisms. All students must complete a comprehensive health evaluation upon entry to the program including physician evaluation and suitability for practice statements as well as vaccinations and blood work related to recommended vaccinations. Tuberculin testing is required. Information regarding health status evaluation is provided to students after admission during new student orientation in May.

Exposure Incidents: All program faculty and students are familiar with current post-exposure protocols for the management of occupational exposures to bloodborne pathogens. The program policy for post-exposure management is outlined in the infection control policy provided in the *BridgeValley Dental Hygiene Policies and Procedures Manual*.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality of all student information including health status is protected by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1994 and current HIPAA guidelines. Faculty health status information is also protected by HIPAA.