

Glossary

(Source: CDC and World Book Medical Encyclopedia)

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome): The final, life-threatening stage of infection with human immunodeficiency virus.

Alcohol-based handrub: An alcohol-containing preparation designed for application to the hands for reducing the number of viable microorganisms on the hands. In the United States, such preparations usually contain 60 percent—95 percent ethanol or isopropanol.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): The ADA is a federal law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, including infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B and C.

Antibiotic: A substance, similar to those produced by certain fungi for destroying bacteria, which kills or inhibits the growth of microorganisms. An antibiotic is used to combat disease and infection.

Antibody: A substance that fights a disease by protecting the body from a virus or bacteria. Vaccines cause the body to develop antibodies to fight a disease.

Antigen: A substance such as bacteria or a virus that invades the body and stimulates the production of an antibody. Recognized as a threat by the immune system, an antigen, such as a chickenpox virus, triggers the production of an antibody.

Antimicrobial soap: Soap (i.e., detergent) containing an antiseptic agent.

Antiseptic agent: Antimicrobial substances that are applied to the skin to reduce the number of microbial flora. Examples include alcohols, chlorhexidine, chlorine, hexachlorophene, iodine, chloroxylenol (PCMX), quaternary ammonium compounds, and triclosan.

Antiseptic handwash: Washing hands with water and soap or other detergents containing an antiseptic agent.

Antiseptic handrub: Applying an antiseptic handrub product to all surfaces of the hands to reduce the number of microorganisms present.

Bacteria: Simple one-celled organisms classified as prokaryotes. Although many bacteria live in the human body without causing harm, some cause tuberculosis, typhoid fever, whooping cough and other diseases.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): The federal public health agency

serving as the center for preventing, tracking, controlling, and investigating the epidemiology of many diseases.

Communicable Disease: This is a disease that is transmitted from one person to another by touching, ingesting, or breathing in secretions from the body or indirectly through touching an object (or drinking from a glass) that has infectious microorganisms on it. Communicable diseases can also be spread by animals, such as flies, mosquitoes or ticks. Examples of communicable (or contagious) diseases include hepatitis B, smallpox, chickenpox, measles and mumps.

Endemic: Continuously present in some degree in a community or region.

Epidemic: An unexpectedly large outbreak of disease in a particular region.

Fungus: A primitive organism including mushrooms, yeasts, rusts and molds. Some fungi are single-celled but differ from bacteria in that they have a distinct nucleus and other cellular structures. Reproduction is accomplished by spores.

Germ: A germ is any microorganism, especially one that causes disease, including bacteria, viruses, fungi or protozoa.

Hand hygiene: A general term that applies to either handwashing, antiseptic handwash, antiseptic handrub, or surgical hand antisepsis.

Handwashing: Washing hands with plain (i.e., non-antimicrobial) soap and water.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus): The virus that causes AIDS. This virus severely damages the immune system by infecting and destroying certain white blood cells.

Hepatitis A: A liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. It is spread when water or food contaminated by feces (stool) from infected people is ingested. There is a vaccine that prevents this disease.

Hepatitis B: A liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus that usually lasts no more than six months, but it can become chronic and lead to serious liver disease and cancer. The hepatitis B virus can be transmitted through blood and body fluids that contain the virus. There is a vaccine that prevents this disease.

Hepatitis C: A liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. It can become chronic and lead to liver disease and cancer. The infection is spread through contact with blood that contains the virus. There is no vaccine to prevent this disease.

Hypodermic needle: A needle used to inject drugs beneath the skin. About 25 percent of new AIDS cases in the United States are caused by injecting drug users sharing hypodermic needles.

Immune System: The body's natural defense against disease caused by invading microbes and cancers. There are two aspects of the immune system's response to disease: *innate and acquired*. The innate response occurs very quickly in response to infection and does not depend on recognizing specific proteins or antigens. The acquired, or learned, immune response occurs when the immune system recognizes very specific pathogens (viruses or bacteria) and creates antibodies to combat those germs.

Immunity: After exposure to a live, weakened, or dead germ, the antibodies or memory cells fight infectious diseases and usually stay in a person's immune system for a lifetime. This protects a person from getting sick again. This protection is called immunity.

Immunization: The process of protecting the body against disease using vaccines or serums. Most children complete their immunization schedule before they begin school.

Infection: Infection is an invasion of the body by a disease-causing organism. The six main types of infective organisms are viruses, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, worms and rickettsia. An infection may enter the body in many ways, including through air that is breathed, food or liquid that is ingested, or directly through the skin.

Infectious Disease: An infectious disease is an illness caused by the growth of disease-producing microorganisms in the body. The infectious disease may be contagious, which means it can be transmitted from human to human.

Pandemic: A pandemic describes an outbreak of disease that affects many people over a large geographical area. A pandemic is more widespread than an epidemic. Examples of a pandemic include the Spanish Flu and AIDS.

Pathogen: A pathogen is any organism or substance that is capable of causing a disease, such as bacteria or viruses.

Protozoa: These are the simplest single-celled organisms to be classified as an animal. Some species can cause infectious diseases.

Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD): This is a communicable disease that is transmitted through sexual intercourse, oral sex or close body contact. The use of latex condoms during sexual activity can help decrease the chance of disease transmission. Examples of STDs include HIV, hepatitis B, genital herpes, syphilis and gonorrhea.

Standard Precautions: These are steps that everyone should take to protect themselves if and when they come into contact with the blood or body fluids of other people. Standard precautions stop the spread of germs to others. Most of the time, you can't tell if a person is infected with AIDS, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or any number of other diseases. The best thing to do is treat the blood and body fluids of every person as potentially infectious. These potentially infectious body fluids include blood and all body fluids except sweat.

Stigma: Stigma refers to a pattern of prejudice, discounting, discrediting, and discrimination directed at people, their close associates and their communities.

Vaccine: A substance that protects a body against a disease by causing the body's immune system to produce antibodies. Some vaccines provide lifelong protection against infection, while others require several doses given at regular intervals.

Virus: A microscopic organism that lives in a cell of another living thing. Viruses are a major cause of disease and can infect human beings with measles, influenza, HIV or the common cold.

Worm: A worm is any of several kinds of invertebrate animals that have soft, slender bodies and no limbs. Many species cause parasitic infections.