

Inter-Office Memorandum

Reference No. HRMS 2014.09.112

TO : ALL EMPLOYEES

FROM : ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

**SUBJECT : HEPATITIS B PREVENTION AND CONTROL IN THE
WORKPLACE PROGRAM (Guidelines for the Implementation of
a Workplace Policy and Program on Hepatitis B)**

DATE : September 12, 2014

INTRODUCTION:

Hepatitis B continues to be a major health concern in the Philippines. Because it is transmitted through blood and body fluids, Hepatitis B is not spread through the usual workplace activities. The job of most workers does not confer a risk for transmission of Hepatitis B virus. However, since the workplace is part of the larger community of Filipinos fighting the Hepatitis B epidemic, strategies need to be implemented to reduce the risk of transmission of Hepatitis B in the workplace and eliminate discrimination against Hepatitis B positive workers. Presently, many job applicants who are Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) positive are declared unfit to work without appropriate medical evaluation and counseling. These individuals are otherwise healthy and can be gainfully employed.

OBJECTIVES:

- To create a health program that will prevent and reduce the occurrence of Hepatitis B.
- To establish a company policy that will eliminate discrimination against Hepatitis B patients.
- To identify and monitor the health status of the Hepatitis B positive workers, regardless of their employment status.

SCOPE:

The workplace policy and program on Hepatitis B shall cover all workers regardless of the employment status.

DEFINITIONS:

1. **Hepatitis-B Virus (HBV) infection** – causes infection of the liver that is transmitted in body fluids such as blood, saliva and semen. Examples of transmission by

parenteral routes are needle-stick injury, injection drug use, blood transfusion, sexual contact and from mother to infant during pregnancy.

2. **Hepatitis B Surface Antigen (HBsAg)** – is detectable in blood in acute and chronic HBV infection and disappears after clearance of the virus.
3. **Acute Hepatitis** - can be silent (subclinical) and may present as body malaise, fatigue, headache, abdominal pain, muscle pain, nausea, vomiting and fever.
4. **Chronic Hepatitis** – is the presence of persistent (at least 6 months) liver infection.

SPECIFIC POLICIES:

A. Advocacy and Information

1. All workers shall be provided with the basic information and education on Hepatitis B. The Clinic shall be responsible for providing appropriate, accurate and updated information regarding Hepatitis B.
2. The company shall extend advocacy, information and training activities to their contractors and supply chain, worker's families, the community and other establishments, as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and to strengthen multi-sectoral partnerships in the prevention and control of Hepatitis B.

B. Preventive Strategies

Prevention of Hepatitis B infection in the workplace is achieved through the implementation of the following strategies:

1. The Company will provide the first 3 doses of Hepatitis B vaccines for all its workers.
2. Measures to improve working conditions, such as adequate hygiene facilities, containments and proper disposal of infectious and potentially contaminated materials will be provided.
3. Personal Protective Equipments shall be made available to all workers in high risk areas such as the Clinic at all times.
4. Workers will be given information and training on adherence to standard or universal precautions in the workplace.

C. Social Policy

1. Non-discriminatory Policy and Practices
 - a. There is no discrimination of any form against workers on the basis of their Hepatitis B status. Workers will not be discriminated against, from pre- to post – employment, including hiring, promotion or assignment because of their Hepatitis B status.
 - b. Individuals found to have Hepatitis B shall not be declared unfit to work without appropriate medical evaluation and counseling.

- c. Workers will not be terminated on the basis of actual, perceived or suspected Hepatitis B status.
- d. Workplace management of sick employees will not differ from that of any other illness. Persons with Hepatitis B-related illnesses should be able to work for as long as the worker is medically fit.

2. Confidentiality

Job applicants and workers shall not be compelled to disclose their Hepatitis B status and other related medical information. Co-workers shall not be obliged to reveal any personal information about fellow workers. Access to personal data relating to a worker's Hepatitis B status shall be bound by the rules of confidentiality and shall be strictly limited to medical personnel or if legally required.

3. Work Accommodation and Arrangement

- a. The company will take measures to reasonably accommodate workers who are Hepatitis B positive or with Hepatitis B-related illnesses.
- b. Through arrangements between management and workers' representatives, measures to support workers with Hepatitis B are encouraged through flexible leave arrangements, rescheduling of working time and arrangement for return to work.

D. Screening, Diagnosis, Treatment and Referral to Health Care Services

- 1. The company Clinic will establish a referral system and provide access to diagnostic and treatment services for its workers for appropriate evaluation/monitoring and management by a specialist.
- 2. Adherence to the guidelines for healthcare providers on the evaluation of Hepatitis B positive workers is highly encouraged.
- 3. Screening for Hepatitis B as a pre-requisite to employment is not mandatory.
- 4. When the employee is confirmed to have Hepatitis B infection for the first time, he/she will be given 30 days sick leave. He/she will be allowed to return to work upon presentation of a medical clearance from a specialist.
- 5. He/she must report to the Clinic every month and must bring the empty medicine container/foils for monitoring purposes.
- 6. He/she will then report to the Clinic for re-evaluation after 6 months.
- 7. The company will require a Hepatitis B Profile annually to closely monitor the status of the Hepatitis B infection.

E. Benefits and Compensation

A worker who contracts Hepatitis B infection in the performance of his/her duty is entitled to sickness benefits under the Social Security System and the Employees Compensation benefits under PD 626.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMPANY AND WORKERS

A. The Managements' Responsibilities

1. The management, together with workers organization and health and safety personnel will develop, implement, monitor, evaluate and if necessary, update the Company's Policy and Program on Hepatitis B.
2. The company will ensure that their Policy and Program on Hepatitis B is adequately funded and made known to all workers.
3. The Company will ensure that their policy and program adheres to existing legislations and guidelines, including provision on leaves, benefits and insurance.
4. The company Clinic will provide information, education and training on Hepatitis B consistent with the standardized basic information package; if not available within the establishment, then provide access to information.
5. The Company will ensure non-discriminatory practices in the workplace.
6. The Company will provide appropriate personal protective equipment to prevent Hepatitis B exposure, especially for those workers exposed to potentially contaminated blood or body fluid.
7. The Company together with the workers organization shall jointly review the policy and program for effectiveness and continue to improve these by networking with government and other organizations promoting Hepatitis B prevention.
8. The Company will ensure confidentiality of the health status of its workers, including those with Hepatitis B.
9. The Company will ensure that access to medical records is limited to authorized personnel.

B. Workers Responsibilities

Workers, as their individual responsibility, shall abide by and support the company Hepatitis B Workplace Policy and Program.

1. The workers association is required to undertake an active role in educating their members on Hepatitis B prevention and control. They must also aim at promoting and practicing healthy lifestyle with emphasis on avoiding high risk behavior and other risk factors that expose workers to increased risk of Hepatitis B infection, consistent with the standardized basic information.
2. Workers will practice nondiscriminatory acts against co-workers with Hepatitis B.
3. Workers and workers' organization will not have access to personal data relating to a worker's Hepatitis B status. The rules of confidentiality shall apply in carrying out the organization functions.
4. The workers must comply with universal precaution and the preventive measures.

5. Workers with Hepatitis B may inform the Company Physician or Nurse on their Hepatitis B status, that is, if their work activities may increase the risk of Hepatitis B infection and transmission or put the Hepatitis B positive at risk for aggravation.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Within the Company, the implementation of the Hepatitis B Policy and Program shall be monitored and evaluated periodically; the Safety and Health Committee or its counterpart shall be tasked for this purpose.

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