

Definitions (infectious disease-related)

Agent: A microorganism, chemical substance, or form of radiation whose presence, excessive presence, or (in deficiency diseases) relative absence is essential for the occurrence of disease.

Airborne infection: Transmission of an infectious agent by particles, dust, or droplet nuclei suspended in the air.

Airborne precautions: Measures designed to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious agents that may be suspended in the air in either small particle aerosols or dust particles. Patients in health care facilities must be given a private room with special air handling and ventilation (negative pressure with respect to the rest of the facility), and an appropriate level of respiratory protection is necessary when entering the patient's room.

Carrier: An individual who can tolerate an infection so as not to become ill and is able to transmit the disease-causing organism to others, to cause infection and illness in others.

Direct transmission: (1) Immediate transfer of an infectious agent from a reservoir to a host. Example: rabid animal bites human being. (2) Person-to-person contact (by touch or droplet) which results in physical transfer of microorganisms between an infected or colonized person and a susceptible host. Example: Paramedic contracts MRSA from a patient while administering CPR.

Droplet precautions: Measures designed to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious agents via large particle droplets that do not remain suspended in air, usually generated by coughing, sneezing, or talking. *Masks must be used, but gowns, gloves, and special air handling are not generally needed.*

Droplet-borne spread (droplet spread): The direct transmission of an infectious agent by means of the droplets (or tiny drops) produced while sneezing, coughing, or talking.

Endemic: The presence or the usual prevalence of a disease or infectious agent in a population within a given geographic area.

Enteric precautions: Measures designed to prevent direct or indirect fecal-oral transmission of disease. *Gowns must be worn if soiling is likely, and gloves must be worn for touching contaminated materials; strict hand hygiene practices must also be applied. Masks are not indicated.*

Enteric: Pertaining to the gastrointestinal tract.

Enzootic: The expected or usual prevalence of a disease or infectious agent in an animal population within a given geographic area (i.e., rabies is endemic in bats in North America). See also, *Zoonotic Disease*.

Sources: www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/disease_reporting/guide/glossary.rtf
and <http://cancerweb.ncl.ac.uk/cgi-bin/omd>
and <http://web.mit.edu/ENVIRONMENT/ehs/topic/HazCommTerms.html>

Epizootic: An epidemic of a disease affecting animals. (Like an epidemic in humans.) See also, *Zoonotic Disease*.

Fecal-oral transmission: Direct or indirect transmission of a disease-causing organism through the shedding of infected stools and contamination of a transmitting vehicle. Transmission can occur through food, water, or from person to person. Hand washing and good hygiene in general are important for preventing diseases that are spread via the fecal-oral route.

Fomite: An inanimate object, such as a handkerchief, pencil, or door handle, that serves to transfer an infectious agent from a source to a susceptible host.

Food handler: Any person directly preparing or handling food or oral medications—includes any person who dispenses medications by hand, assists in feeding, or provides mouth care. In health care facilities, this includes those who set up trays for patients to eat, feed or assist patients in eating, give oral medications, or give mouth/denture care. In day care facilities, schools and community residential programs, this includes those who prepare food for clients to eat, feed or assist clients in eating, or give oral medications.

Food poisoning: Poisoning that results from eating foods contaminated with toxins. These toxins may occur naturally, as in certain mushrooms or seafood; they may be chemical or biologic contaminants; or they may be metabolic products of infectious agents that are present in the food.

Foodborne disease: Illness resulting from ingestion of contaminated food. Can be either (1) food poisoning (intoxication) or (2) an infection resulting from ingestion of a pathogen that replicates inside the host.

Foodborne pathogen: Microorganism causing illness through ingestion of food.

Handwashing: Thorough and frequent handwashing is the single best protection against infectious disease in all settings.

Host: An organism (usually human or animal) that is capable of being infected by a specific agent (*e.g., a person infected by contaminated food or a horse infected by West Nile Virus*).

Indirect transmission: when a susceptible host is infected via contaminated object (fomite) such as a glove, wound dressing, door handle, telephones, etc.

Infection: Invasion of the body by harmful organisms such as bacteria, fungi, protozoa, rickettsiae, or viruses.

Infectious agent: Disease-causing organisms such as bacteria, fungi, protozoa, rickettsiae, or viruses.

Murine: Pertaining to mice.

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Personal Protective Equipment: Any devices or clothing worn to protect against hazards in the environment. Examples are respirators, gloves, and chemical splash goggles.

Plasma: The straw-colored, noncellular portion of circulating blood (see also, *Serum*).

PPE: See *Personal Protective Equipment*.

Reservoir: Any person, animal, arthropod, plant, soil, or substance wherein an infectious agent lives and multiplies. Sometimes referred to as the “natural habitat” of the infectious agent. The pathogen does not sicken or kill the reservoir. The reservoir is the source from which other individuals can be infected. (*e.g., the white-footed mouse is the reservoir of Lyme Disease.*)

Sera: Plural of serum

Serum: The straw-colored fluid that separates from coagulated blood after blood is allowed to stand (see also, *Plasma*).

Types of precautions you can take to prevent contagion:

Vector: An insect or any living carrier that transports an infectious agent from an infected individual or its wastes to a susceptible individual or its food or immediate surroundings.

Vehicle: An inanimate object such as food, water, surgical scalpel, or handkerchief that transports an infectious agent from a reservoir or source of infection to a susceptible host. (See also: **Fomite**.)

Zoonoses: Plural of zoonosis.

Zoonosis: A zoonotic disease.

Zoonotic Disease: Infectious disease of animals that can be transmitted to humans. The natural reservoir is non-human species.