



NHS Management Executive  
St. Andrew's House  
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25 October 1996

**FOR  
REFERENCE ONLY**

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Dear Colleague

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DANGEROUS  
PATHOGENS  
GUIDANCE ON CATEGORISATION OF BIOLOGICAL  
AGENTS ACCORDING TO HAZARD AND  
CATEGORIES OF CONTAINMENT**

**Summary**

1. This letter draws your attention to the above guidance produced by the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP). The ACDP advises the Health and Safety Commission (HSC), Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Health and Agriculture Ministers as required on all aspects of hazard and risks from exposure to pathogens and has a joint Department of Health/HSE Secretariat. The Scottish Office Department of Health has observer status on the ACDP. The guidance updates and replaces guidance which issued under cover of NHS Circular No 1984(GEN)22 and SOHHD/DGM(1991)14.

**Background**

2. Previous guidance documents on categorisation of pathogens according to hazard and categories of containment, which were produced by the ACDP in 1984 and revised in 1990, introduced to the United Kingdom the terms "Hazard Group" and "Containment Level". These phrases are now part of the common language in all laboratories and production plants that deal with micro-organisms, and their consistent use provides part of the national structure for working safely with infectious agents.

3. The latest edition contains practical standards for the safe conduct of work with infectious biological agents, in particular in laboratories, to align with the recent changes in the new Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1994. These result from implementation of European Community Directives 90/679/EEC (on the protection of workers from risks related to biological agents at work) and 93/88/EEC (which contains a Community classification of biological agents).

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Reference Index  
962133  
Date

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The new text has been updated and added to in the light of new information, and includes:

- a. information on the relevant legislation (notably COSHH 1994), making a clear distinction between what is obligatory and what is a recommendation;
- b. the Approved List of biological agents;
- c. a revised exemption certificate;
- d. guidance relating to the containment measures prescribed in COSHH 1994 at Schedule 9, Part 2 (laboratories) and Part 3 (industrial processes);
- e. other guidance on containment, additional control measures, immunisation etc, as before; and
- f. an extended range of appendices on, for example, specific micro-organisms.

### **Need for New Guidance**

4. The implementation, through COSHH 1994, of a number of Directives on worker safety since the publication of the 1990 edition of the guidance, prompted the need for up-to-date guidance on how to meet the requirements of this legislation. Additionally, the opportunity was taken to update and expand the guidance.

### **Statement by the Health and Safety Commission about the Guidance**

5. The Health and Safety Commission has endorsed the practical guidance contained in this document and commends it to those who work with biological agents or who are otherwise exposed in various occupations.

6. The guidance should be read in conjunction with the COSHH Regulations 1994. While it is not mandatory and you are free to take other action, if you adhere to this guidance, you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to ensure compliance with the law and may refer to the guidance as illustrating good practice.

### **How to Obtain Copies of the Guidance**

7. The guidance is published by HSE Books, price £8.50 (ISBN 0-7176-1038-1) and can be ordered through most booksellers.

Yours sincerely



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Director of Human Resources