Heads of Functional Areas with Schools, Departments, Centres or Units whose research or day to day work activities (both on and off campus or by virtue of work related travel), may bring staff in contact with Biological Agents (listed per the Regulations) are advised that:

1. The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 572 of 2013) are now in force in Ireland and repeal the previous regulations of 1984/1988.
2. These Regulations set down the minimum requirements for the protection of workers from the health risks associated with Biological Agents in the workplace. These Regulations define Biological Agents (*within the group headings of Bacteria, Fungi, Helminths, Prions, Protozoa, Viruses as listed in Schedule 1*) and apply to activities in which workers are (or potentially are), exposed to Biological Agents as a result of their work, **wherever the employee undertakes said work, both on or off campus or abroad.** Accordingly the provisions of the 2013 Regulations must be applied to any/all work activities falling within the scope of the regulations, by the management of Schools/Departments/Centres/ Units involved with said work.

**Special measures are prescribed under Regulations 16 and 17** of the revised regulations and these have particular relevance to some Functional Areas within the University.

* Regulation 16 has specific relevance to health care and veterinary care facilities - other than diagnostic laboratories.
* Regulation 17 has specific relevance to University research/ teaching and applies to a place of work which is either or both (a) a laboratory, including a diagnostic laboratory, and (b) a room for laboratory animals, (which animals— have been deliberately infected with— a group 2, 3 or 4 biological agent or are, or are suspected to be, carriers of such an agent) and where work is to be carried out within such areas, which involves the handling of a class 2, 3 or 4 biological agent **for research, development or teaching or diagnostic purposes.**

**\* Classification of Biological Agents – Groups 2, 3 & 4**

A "group 2 biological agent", means one that can cause human disease and might be a hazard to employees, although it is unlikely to spread to the community and in respect of which, there is usually effective prophylaxis or treatment available

A "group 3 biological agent" means one that can cause severe human disease and presents a serious hazard to employees and which may present a risk of spreading to the community, although there is usually effective prophylaxis or treatment available

A "group 4 biological agent" means one that causes severe human disease and is a serious hazard to employees and which may present a high risk of spreading to the community and in respect of which there is usually no effective prophylaxis or treatment available

**Refer to Schedule 1 of the Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations, 2013** (**S.I. No .248/1998), for current classification of biological agents.**

**A copy of the Regulations may be downloaded from the H.S.A. web site at** [**www.HSA.ie**](http://www.HSA.ie)

1. The impact of any research work with biological agents/biological materials, for and upon all employees within such work areas or who handle biological material used or generated therein, must be risk assessed and adequately controlled locally by the management/ PIs conducting the work in conjunction with the line manager of said staff. (e.g. staff who may service the areas where the research is conducted e.g. personnel such as maintenance, security staff, lab aides, contractor cleaners must be considered). The handling of all biological supply sources and waste streams generated must also be risk assessed up until it is rendered safe to humans/ rendered biologically inactive.
2. Work activities involving potential sources of infection from active biological agents through contact with body fluids and bodily wastes, contact with known or suspected sources of infection in non-research lab environs also needs to be risk assessed under the general legal obligations arising from the SHWW Act as supplemented by these Regulations.

Employee work activities and work environs to consider (and risk assess) include where biological materials with potential sources of infections may be encountered in an occupational context include:

GP/Dental/ health care settings; sports performance labs; animal/bird husbandry; mortuary work; outdoor work activities including field work and work on farms and on grounds; food dietary research using stool samples; occupational first aiders; premises/facilities; upkeep of sanitary systems; foreign travel (work related) to areas with public health issues and outbreaks of diseases; work conducted in sewers, tunnels, caves, ponds, lakes and water courses , bird/bat/vermin nesting sites including attics; work undertaken in sewerage plants or near sewerage outfalls; work within potentially contaminated areas of urban river/harbour waters also needs to be considered.

The Occupational Health Physician can advise further on staff foreign travel RA to developing areas and to areas with disease epidemics and areas with risks associated with the consumption of biologically contaminated food/water supplies.

Permanent and temporary work environs and regular / infrequent or one off work activities need to be considered and risk assessed and appropriate specific or universal risk controls applied as appropriate to the risk and risk context.

1. The impact of the work of employees with biological agents on non-employees such as students, visitors must also be considered and adequately controlled. (General duties of care obligations arise to third parties under Common Law. Students are not employees under SHWW law but may potentially have exposure to similar risks as part of their studies. Students may also be pregnant or have allergies or short/ long term medical conditions that their academic supervisor may need to provide for by way of individual protection/controls involving the student and the Student Health Service).
2. Functional Area management must ensure that the Heads of any constituent School/Department/ Institute/ Centre, where activities involves employees working with Biological Agents, puts effective arrangements in place to**:**
3. **Identify the Biological Agent** to which their staff (workers) are, or may be, exposed.
4. **Assess the risk**, prior to work commencing or continuing in the case of pre-existing work, making use of the list of Biological Agents, their classification, containment levels and measures provided for in the Code of Practice to the Biological Agents Regulations. (SHWW Act obligations and UCC Safety Policy refers).
5. The risk assessment should give consideration to the additional risks to employees whose susceptibility to infection may be compromised, for example because of medication, pre-existing disease, compromised immunity or breast feeding. Some biological agents have the potential to affect certain sensitive risk groups and there is a specific legal obligation the SHWW (General Application) Regulations, 2007, (S.I. No. 299 of 2007) to assess the exposure of children and young persons and pregnant, post natal and breast feeding employees to biological agents
6. **Implement the risk controls/ containment levels**, prior to work commencing or continuing for pre-existing work. (SHWW Act obligations and UCC Safety Policy refers)
7. **Manage the risk on a 24/7 basis** and proceed in accordance with the remaining Regulations (SHWW Act obligations and UCC Safety Policy refers). This includes:
8. Implementing the risk controls appropriate to the classification involved, on an ongoing basis whilst that category of work is being undertaken.
9. Developing and implementing task specific Safe Operating Procedures (SOPs).
10. Implementing the Special measures set out in Regulation 16 and 17 of the Regulations - as and where relevant to their facilities and activities.
11. Instituting a regime of pre-use checks on all essential safety equipment such as Bio-safety cabinets, air pressurisation containment systems and essential equipment/ PPE.
12. Making mandatory Notification to the HSA in the case of the first use of prescribed classes of Biological Agent and prescribed RE-NOTIFICATIONS.
13. Arranging for medical surveillance via an Occupational Health Physician as where relevant to the residual risk remaining (following RA and Risk controls).
14. Providing appropriate training and information to staff and local consultation with staff on measures to be applied within their individual work areas.
15. Providing appropriate information to visitors and to maintenance, security and contract cleaners and to students.
16. Making copies of up to date risk assessments and safety data sheets available at the lab and department level. (point of use).
17. Providing appropriate PPE and hygiene/welfare measures to staff at source at the departments expense. (PPE must be issued individually and maintained regularly. Comprehensive records should be kept).
18. Providing appropriate facilities for the deactivation of biological material at source and / or safe disposal of biological waste and contaminated sharps in secure approved receptacles via a licensed contractor.
19. Making appropriate vaccinations available to relevant staff, where appropriate to the risk (at the departments expense – using the providers contracted to UCC). Advising contractors and students to protect themselves similarly (Contractors via their Company GP, Students via UCC Student Health).
20. Making provision for local response to emergencies, first aid and advice/information support to the Emergency Services and UCC General Services Duty Officer for incidents involving Biological Agents under the FAs control and then executing any required reporting to the H.S.A arising.
21. Signposting of each lab / room facility and receptacle with SHWW CPL Regulations Bio hazard warning signs (yellow) and providing details/ information at the point of entry to the area/ room of the highest biological classification hazard likely to be encountered therein (current up to date information). Labelling autoclaved (deactivated) materials with appropriate labels prior to disposal as general waste.
22. Maintaining effective up to date records at the FA level of:
* All notifications made to the H.S.A. under the 2013 Regulations
* Employee who are working with or who have worked with Any class 3 and 4 of Biological Agent as set in the 2013 regulations and any of 4 number Class 2 Biological Agents (HHV8, BK &JC polyomavirus, Human papillomavius . Records must be kept for at least 10 years after the last exposure). In the case of biological agents with *chronic effects* the staff list shall be kept for an appropriately longer period following the last know exposure of the employee(s) concerned.
* Offers of vaccinations made to staff and their acceptance or otherwise.
* Training and PPE provided to staff (as and when issued/provided).
* Consultation with/information provided to staff or Safety Representatives.
* Maintenance of Respiratory protective equipment, RPE fit testing
* Maintenance of biological safety cabinets and filter changes
* Deactivation of biologically active material prior to disposal
* Incidents involving Biological Agents as reported by the FA to the H.S.A.
* Up-to-date Safety data sheets for all material in use (no exceptions).

**Note:** Biological Agent RA forms may be downloaded from the UCC H&S Office website. Under SHWW law these RA’s and any SDS sheets must be made available to relevant employees, staff safety representatives and emergency responders. SHWW law obligations overrides any/all confidentiality agreements with research partners or sponsors.

**1.0 Relevant Information**

These Regulations define Biological Agents as set out below and apply to activities in which workers are or potentially are exposed to Biological Agents as a result of their work, **wherever the employee undertakes said work.**

These regulations also apply to cell cultures and to Genetically Modified Micro-organisms (GMM's/GMO's). It must be noted that the SHWW Biological Agent Regulations are separate from the authorised use of GMO's environmental legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency. [GMO assessments are more focused on the environmental impact, whereas the Biological Agent Regulations are focused on the prevention of any adverse impact on *employee health and safety at work}*

The 2013 Regulations enable the publication of some aspects of the EU Biological Agents Directive (i.e. the list of Biological Agents and their classification, together with indications concerning containment measures and levels) in a related Code of Practice (COP). **A copy of the COP may be downloaded from the H.S.A. web site at** [**www.HSA.ie**](http://www.HSA.ie)

The 2013 Regulations permit the Health and Safety Authority to prohibit a specific use of a Biological Agent or request that additional control measures are put in place (Regulation 4).

The 2013 Regulations (S.I. No. 572 of 2013) transpose European Directives of the European Parliament and the previous SHWW Biological Agent Regulations of 1994/1998 - See more at: <http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/#sthash.Lvxmz7vx.dpuf>

**2.0 Classification of Biological Agents**

Biological Agents are classified in the Code of Practice to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations, 2013, into four risk groups – groups 1, 2, 3 and 4. (see details from the H.S.A web site appended below)

The classification system is based on whether:

* The agent is pathogenic to humans
* The agent is a hazard to employees
* The agent is transmissible to the community
* There is effective treatment or prophylaxis available

Under the classification system, Group 1 agents are the least hazardous whilst Group 4 are the most hazardous.

Schedule 1 of the Code of Practice provides a non-exhaustive classification list of Biological Agents. Only agents in hazard groups 2 – 4 are listed.

If the agent(s) your School/Department/Institute/ Centre are working with is not on the list, the categorisation will need to be determined by assessment based on the criteria above.

**Biological Agents should not be automatically categorised into hazard group 1**.

The categorisation system gives an indication of the inherent hazard of the Biological Agent **but it does not take account of the work that may be carried out with the agent or the exposure of sensitive groups, for example, pregnant employees to** - See more at: <http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/#sthash.Lvxmz7vx.dpuf>

**3.0 Biological Agents Notification** - to the H.S.A (and internally to relevant UCC HoF)

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013, there is **a legal requirement to notify the Health and Safety Authority** if working with certain groups of Biological Agents. (In the case of UCC this requirement must be discharged by the management of all relevant Functional Areas who’s constituent Schools/Departments/ Institutes/ Centres work with Biological Agents).

Each FA should maintain a record, of all notifications sent to the HSA by its constituent Schools/Departments/ Institutes/ Centres and review its accuracy at least annually.

**Notification** is required **30 days prior to commencement of work with respect to:**

* First time use of a group 2 Biological Agents
* First time use of a group 3 Biological Agents
* First time use of a group 4 Biological Agents

**First time of each subsequent use of group 4 Biological Agent and new group 3 Biological Agents,** where the employer, (in the case of UCC – the relevant FA management provisionally classifies that Biological Agent.

Laboratories carrying out a purely diagnostic service are not required to notify the Authority unless they are working with a group 4 Biological Agent. However, if the laboratory is deliberately propagating or concentrating group 2 or group 3 Biological Agents, then notification will be required. If a group 2 – 4 Biological Agent is being stored in a culture collection, this will need to be notified to the Authority as the collection will need to be maintained and this will involve viability checks of the agent and deliberate propagation.

**Notification** may be made using the HSAs [Biological Agents’ notification form](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Business_Licensing_and_Notification_Requirements/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_Notification.docx)  or by other suitable methods. If using an alternative method it is a legal requirement that the information as detailed in Regulation 14 (1) (f) of the Biological Agents’ regulations is included in the notification.

(**Note in the case of Section 2 (4) of the H.S.A notification form. The names and capabilities of the person responsible for safety and health at work at the dept level must be entered. Line management responsibilities for H&S are as per UCC Safety Policy).**

**3.1 What information must be contained in this Notification?**

Information that must be contained in the H.S.A. Notification include:

1. **The name and address of the establishment or undertaking (or both):** this must relate to the place where the work is being carried out. **For example, in the case of Universities, the department or faculty carrying out the work must be documented including the specific location or laboratory facility in question.**
2. The names and capabilities of the person responsible for safety and health at work: **this must document the names and capabilities (e.g. experience / training etc.) of those at the local departmental level within the area where the work is being conducted.**
3. **The results of the risk assessment**: at a minimum this should include the type of infection likely, the mode of transmission (e.g. skin contact) etc.
4. **The species of Biological Agent**
5. **The protective and preventative measures that are envisaged.** (Have due regard to the minimum requirements specified in Schedules 2, 3 and 4 in the Code of Practice)

**Therefore for the purposes of notification an adequate risk assessment which should be site, task and agent specific, as appropriate and should be submitted together with the notification form.**

**3.2 Re-notification** is required for all groups if there are changes to processes, procedures or the Biological Agent, that are of importance to safety and health at work that result in the original notification being invalid or out of date.

Notifications may be submitted to the Authority:

* By email to bioagents\_notif@hsa.ie
* In writing to the Health and Safety Authority, Occupational Hygiene Unit, 3rd Floor Hebron House, Hebron Rd, Kilkenny.
* By fax, for the attention of the Occupational Hygiene Unit, to 01 – 6147020

**Note that the notification requirement is not an approval or licensing system.**

- See more at: <http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/#sthash.Lvxmz7vx.dpuf>

Encl. Annotated Extracts from the HSA website Biological Agent FAQs

4.0 Annotated Extracts from the HSA website Biological Agent FAQs

**4.1** [What is a Biological Agent](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#what)

A Biological Agent is a micro-organism, including those that have been genetically modified, a cell culture and a human endoparasite, which may be able to provoke any infection, allergy or toxicity. Agents are classified into 4 risk groups according to their level of risk of infection and can relate to bacteria, fungi, virus, parasites etc. These groups are:

**\* Classification of Biological Agents – Groups 2, 3 & 4**

A "group 2 biological agent", means one that can cause human disease and might be a hazard to employees, although it is unlikely to spread to the community and in respect of which, there is usually effective prophylaxis or treatment available

A "group 3 biological agent" means one that can cause severe human disease and presents a serious hazard to employees and which may present a risk of spreading to the community, although there is usually effective prophylaxis or treatment available

A "group 4 biological agent" means one that causes severe human disease and is a serious hazard to employees and which may present a high risk of spreading to the community and in respect of which there is usually no effective prophylaxis or treatment available

**Refer to Schedule 1 of the Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations, 2013** (**S.I. No .248/1998), for current classification of biological agents.**

**4.2** [Exposure](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#exposure) - **What work activities might involve exposure to Biological Agents?**

Activities that may involve exposure to Biological Agents include, but are not limited to:

* Work in food production plants
* Work in agriculture
* Work in biotechnology, including the production of some pharmaceutical products
* Work activities where there is contact with animals or products of animal origin (or both)
* Work in health care and dentistry, including isolation and post mortem units, funeral and cremation undertakings, surgical units.
* Work in clinical, veterinary and diagnostic laboratories, excluding diagnostic microbiological laboratories
* Work in refuse disposal plants
* Work in sewage purification installations
* Work with human samples/ stools in research and clinical situations
* Work with animal and human wastes both in maintenance and animal husbandry/research.
* Outdoor work and work in underground areas, caves or in an attics where bats, birds or rats may be present
* Maintenance work in bio hazard labs particularly plumbing trades.

**4.2.1 What measures should be put in place if it is not technically possible to prevent exposure to Biological Agents?**

Where it is not technically possible to prevent exposure to Biological Agents, measures to be taken so as to reduce the risk of exposure and to ensure the control of any remaining risk so as to protect the worker should include:

1. Keep the number of employees exposed or likely to be exposed to a Biological Agent as low as possible.
2. Work processes and engineering control measures should be designed so as to avoid or minimise the release of a Biological Agent into the place of work.
3. Use both collective protection measures and individual protection measures where exposure cannot be avoided by other means.
4. Use hygiene measures compatible with the aim of preventing or reducing the accidental transfer or release of a Biological Agent from the workplace.
5. Use the bio-hazard sign (depicted in the Third Schedule of the 2013 Biological Agents Regulations), and other relevant warning signs.
6. Draw up plans to deal with accidents involving a Biological Agent.
7. Test, where it is necessary and technically possible, for the presence, outside the primary physical confinement, of a Biological Agent used at work.
8. Use means for safe collection, storage and disposal of waste by employees, including the use of secure and identifiable containers, after suitable treatment where appropriate.
9. Make arrangements for the safe collection, storage and disposal of waste by employees within the workplace.

**4.2.2 What are the health effects associated with exposure to Biological Agents?**

Biological Agents can cause 3 types of disease:

* Infections caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites
* Allergies instigated by exposure to mould organic dusts, e.g. flour dust, enzymes and mites
* Poisoning or toxic effects

Some biological hazards also have the potential to cause cancer or foetal harm. Common occupational infections and their causative agents are detailed in [Appendix 1 of the Guidelines to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 572 of 2013)](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Chemical_and_Hazardous_Substances/Guidelines_to_the_Safety_Health_and_Welfare_at_Work_Biological_Agents_Regulations_2013.html)

**4.2.3 What must an employer** *(Functional Area management in the case of UCC*) **do if an employee is exposed to Biological Agents?**

If an employee is exposed to a Biological Agent, the employer must:

* Keep a list of the employees who may be exposed to a particular group 2 Biological Agent specified in a relevant Code of Practice  and Group 3 or a group 4 Biological Agent (or both), indicating the type of work done by each employee, and, whenever possible, the Biological Agent to which they have been exposed, as well as records of exposures, accidents and incidents, as appropriate
* Keep the list referred to above for at least 10 years following the end of exposure
* Keep the list referred to above for an appropriately longer period not exceeding 40 years, depending on the likely duration of risk to the safety and health of employees determined during the risk assessment, following exposures which may result in an infection-:

i. with a Biological Agent known to be capable of establishing persistent or latent infections
ii. that, in the light of present knowledge, is not diagnosable until illness later develops
iii. that has particularly long incubation periods before illness develops
iv. that result in illness that recrudesces at times over a long period despite treatment, or
v. that result in illness that may have serious long-term consequences
* Ensure that each employee has access to the information on the list which relates to him or her personally.
* Ensure that the employees or their safety representative (or both) have access to collective information which does not identify information relating to any individual employee.
* Ensure that the list is made available, on request, to the responsible medical practitioner or the Authority or a person designated under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 for inspection.
* Ensure that the employees or their safety representative (or both) have access, on request, to the information contained in the Notification.

**4.3** [Risk Assessment](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#riskassessment) - **Does the employer have to carry out a Risk Assessment?**

Yes. It is the duty of every employer, (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres)* , under Section 19 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to carry out a risk assessment. In addition to this requirement under the 2005 Act, the Biological Agents regulations require that the employer:

* Assesses any risk to the safety and health of employees resulting from any activity at that employer's place of work likely to involve a risk of exposure of any employee to a Biological Agent. It is the employer’s duty to determine the nature, degree and duration of any employee's exposure to a Biological Agent and to lay down the measures to be taken to ensure the safety and health of such employees.
* Keeps the risk assessment in written form
* Assesses the risk, in the case of activities involving exposure to several groups of a Biological Agent, on the basis of the danger presented by all hazardous Biological Agents present.
* Renews the risk assessment regularly and, in any event, whenever there is a change in conditions at the place of work which may affect any employee's exposure to a Biological Agent.
* Conducts the risk assessment on the basis of all available information, including:

- The classification of a Biological Agent which is or may be a hazard to human health
- Information on diseases which may be contracted as a result of the work of the employees
- Potential allergenic or toxigenic effects as a result of the work of the employees
- Knowledge of a disease from which an employee is found to be suffering and which has a direct connection with his work
- Any recommendations which may be made by the Authority indicating that a particular Biological Agent should be controlled in order to protect employees' health where employees are or may be exposed to such a Biological Agent as a result of their work.

4.4 [Notification](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#Notification) - **Does the HSA have to be notified of work involving the use of Biological Agents?**

The Health and Safety Authority require notification 30 days prior to the commencement of work for the following activities:

* First time use of a group 2 Biological Agent.
* First time use of a group 3 Biological Agent and any subsequent new group 3 Biological Agents, where the employer provisionally classifies that Biological Agent.
* First time use of a group 4 Biological Agent and first time use of each subsequent group 4 Biological Agents.
* Laboratories providing a diagnostic service in relation to group 4 Biological Agents are required only to make an initial notification.
* Re-notification is required for all groups where there are changes to processes, procedures or the Biological Agent that are of importance to safety and health at work that result in the original notification being invalid or out of date.

**4.4.1 What information must be contained in this Notification?**

Information that must be contained in the Notification include:

* The name and address of the establishment or undertaking (or both): this must relate to the place where the work is being carried out. For example, in the case of Universities, the department or faculty carrying out the work must be documented including the specific location or laboratory facility in question.
* The names and capabilities of the person responsible for safety and health at work: this must document the names and capabilities (e.g. experience / training etc.) of those at the local level.
* The results of the risk assessment: at a minimum this should include the type of infection likely, the mode of transmission (e.g. skin contact) etc.
* The species of Biological Agent
* The protective and preventative measures that are envisaged.

Therefore for the purposes of notification an adequate risk assessment which should be site, task and agent specific, as appropriate and should be submitted together with the notification form.

***However, it must be noted that notification is not an approval or licensing system.***

**4.4.2 Where do I get these forms for notifying the HSA?**

There is no approved form for notification. However, the [**Form of Notification for & use of a Group 2,3 or 4 Biological Agent**](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Business_Licensing_and_Notification_Requirements/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_Notification.docx) may be used for notifying the Authority. Other notification methods may also be used, provided the required information (above) is included.

**4.5** [Protection Measures](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#protectionmeasures) - **What hygiene and individual protection measures should be taken when working with Biological Agents?**

In the case of any activity in relation to which there is a risk to the safety or health of employees caused by working with a Biological Agent, the employer (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional Area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres)*, must take appropriate measures to ensure that:

* Employees do not eat or drink in any location within a place of work where there is a risk of contamination by a Biological Agent
* Employees are provided with suitable washing and toilet facilities, which may include eye washes and skin antiseptics (or both)
* Employees are provided with suitable personal protective equipment (PPE)
* Any necessary PPE is:
i. properly stored in a designated place
ii. checked and cleaned if possible, before, and in any case after each use
iii. repaired, where defective, or replaced, before further use
* Procedures are specified for taking, handling and processing samples of human or animal origin
* Working clothes and PPE, which may be contaminated by a Biological Agent, are removed on leaving the working areas and, before taking measures for cleaning/decontaminating/destroying, kept separately from other clothing
* The working clothes and PPE are decontaminated and cleaned or, if necessary, destroyed.

**4.6** [Vaccination](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#vaccination) - **Do all employees who work with Biological Agents need to get vaccinated?**

It is the duty of the employer, (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional Area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres)* to ensure that effective vaccines are made available when necessary. Therefore, if the risk assessment reveals that there is a risk to the safety and health of employees due to their exposure to a Biological Agent for which effective vaccines exist, the employer must offer them vaccination, free of charge.

Employees should be informed of the benefits and drawbacks of both vaccination and non-vaccination, and a vaccination certificate may be drawn up which should be made available to the employee concerned and, on request, to the Authority. Records of vaccination and follow-up as necessary should be kept and retained.

The UCC sessional OHP can advise FA management further on this. Work risk vaccination programmes are already being undertaken by many departments in UCC. Work related Travel vaccinations must also be considered and offered to relevant staff depending on their area of travel and activities

**4.7** [Health Surveillance](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#healthsurveillance)

**4.7.1 Does the employer have to provide health surveillance to all employees?**

Yes. It is the employer’s duty, (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional Area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres)*, to make provisions for relevant health surveillance to be made available for those employees for whom the results of any risk assessment reveals a risk to their safety or health. Such health surveillance, where appropriate, must be made available prior to exposure to Biological Agents and at regular intervals thereafter.

These health surveillance arrangements must be such that it is directly possible to implement individual and occupational hygiene measures. Additionally, after health surveillance has been undertaken, a further reassessment of the risk of exposure must be made.

Individual records of health surveillance must be kept and be made available, on request, to the employee concerned.

**The UCC sessional OHP can advise FA management further on this.**

**4.7.2 What is involved in health surveillance?**

Where appropriate, the responsible medical practitioner carrying out health surveillance should be familiar with the exposure conditions or circumstances of each employee.

Health surveillance of employees must be carried out in accordance with the principles and practices of occupational medicine. As a minimum, it must include at least the following measures:

* The keeping of records of an employee's medical and occupational history
* A personalised assessment of the employee's state of health
* Where appropriate, biological monitoring as well as detection of early and reversible effects.

Further tests may be decided upon for each employee, when he is the subject of health surveillance, in light of the most recent knowledge available to occupational medicine, on the advice of the responsible medical practitioner.

**4.7.3 How long should individual health records and medical records from health surveillance be kept for?**

The employer, (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional Area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres)* and responsible medical practitioner is required to retain individual health records and individual confidential medical records respectively for an ‘appropriate’ time, usually between 10 to 40 years, depending on the length of time of exposure and/or the likely duration of risk to the safety and health of the employee due to exposure.

The UCC sessional OHP can advise FA management further on this.

**4.8** [Additional Questions](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#additionalquestions)

**4.8.1 Should employees receive any specific training or information regarding working with Biological Agents?**

Yes. Where there is a risk to the safety or health of employees due to work with a Biological Agent, the employer, (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional Area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres)*, must ensure that employees or their safety representative, or both, receive sufficient and appropriate training and information concerning:

* Potential risks to health
* Precautions to be taken to prevent exposure
* Hygiene requirements
* The wearing and use of personal protective equipment, special protective clothing and personal protective equipment.
* The steps to be taken by employees in the case of incidents and to prevent incidents

Additionally, the employer, (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional Area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres)* must provide such information to any employer of other employees or any self-employed person who may be affected by exposure to a Biological Agent arising from his/her undertaking. The employer must also provide appropriate training and written instructions at the place of work and, if appropriate, display notices containing the procedure to be followed in the case of:

* A serious accident or incident involving the handling of a Biological Agent, or
* The handling of a group 4 Biological Agent

Also, the employer, (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional Area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres)* must ensure that his/her employees or their safety representative (or both) are informed as quickly as possible of any accident or incident which may have resulted in the release of a Biological Agent which could cause severe human infection or illness (or both), and of the causes of and measures taken in relation to any such serious accident or incident.

**4.8.2 What additional provisions must be in place for those who work in a health care or veterinary care setting?**

Particular measures that must be implemented to protect the safety and health of employees working in either a health care or veterinary care facility include:

* Specifying appropriate decontamination and disinfection procedures
* Implementing procedures enabling contaminated waste to be handled and disposed of without risk

In addition, when carrying out the risk assessment in a health care or veterinary care setting, the employer, (*In the case of UCC this must be discharged by each relevant Functional Area and the management of its constituent Schools/ Departments/ Institute and Centres),* must pay particular attention to:

* The risks posed by the nature of the work
* The uncertainties about the presence of a Biological Agent in human patients or animals and the materials and specimens taken from them
* The hazard represented by a Biological Agent known or suspected to be present in human patients or animals and the materials and specimens taken from them
* The containment measures specified in Schedule 2 of the relevant Code of Practice

**4.8.3 I work in a laboratory where the animals are either deliberately infected with a Biological Agent or where the animals are suspected carriers of such agent(s). What should my employer be doing?**

In laboratories where work involves the handling of group 2, 3 or 4 Biological Agents for research, development, teaching or diagnostic purposes, containment measures, in accordance with the Schedule 2 of the relevant Code of Practice for the Biological Agents Regulations, must be implemented.

Following the risk assessment, work activities involving the handling of a Biological Agent can only be carried out in:

* Working areas corresponding to at least containment level 2 specified in Schedule 2 of the relevant Code of Practice.
* Working areas corresponding to at least containment level 3 specified in Schedule 2 of the relevant Code of Practice.
* Working areas corresponding to at least containment level 4 specified in Schedule 2 of the relevant Code of Practice

In laboratories where it is not the aim to work with a Biological Agent, e.g. cultivating or concentrating a Biological Agent, but uncertainties still exist about the presence of a Biological Agent that may cause human disease, e.g. in the materials being handled in the lab, then, as a minimum, the containment level 2 of Schedule 2 in the relevant Code of Practice must be adopted. Additionally, containment levels specified in column 3 or 4 of Schedule 2 in the relevant Code of Practice must be adopted where it is known or suspected that it is necessary.

**4.8.4 Are there Occupational Exposure Limit Values (OELV's) set for these Biological Agents?**

No. There are currently no Occupational Exposure Limit Values (OELV's) set for Biological Agents, although some Member States of the EU have set limits relating to the toxins which can be produced by certain Biological Agents. OELV's have not been set because the essential difference between Biological Agents and other hazardous substances is their ability to reproduce/replicate. A small amount of a micro-organism may grow considerably in a very short time under favourable conditions and so the value/ level/volume of an organism does not remain constant.

- See more at: <http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Biological_Agents/Biological_Agents_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions/#sthash.c2MMhd6T.dpuf>