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WHO PERSONNEL POLICY ON AIDS AND HIV INFECTION

In response to the global AIDS crisis, the organizations of the United Nations Common System have seen a need to establish principles and strategies for the implementation of a personnel policy concerning the impact of HIV infection and AIDS on the personnel of the United Nations. The policy covers four areas:

- Information, education and other preventive health measures;
- Voluntary testing, counselling and confidentiality;
- Terms of appointment and service;
- Health insurance benefits programmes;

All the organizations of the United Nations Common System are bound by this policy which aims at helping to achieve some of the objectives of the global strategy for the prevention and control of AIDS.

A copy of WHO's personnel policy on AIDS and HIV infection is attached. Earlier this year, copies of the publication "AIDS and HIV Infection, information for United Nations employees and families" were distributed to all staff members.

WHO PERSONNEL POLICY ON AIDS AND HIV INFECTION

A. INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND OTHER PREVENTIVE HEALTH MEASURES

1. WHO staff members and their families will be provided with appropriate, updated information to enable them to protect themselves from HIV infection and to cope with the presence of AIDS.

To this end, all United Nations bodies are being encouraged to develop and implement an active staff education strategy for HIV/AIDS utilizing, inter alia, the handbook on AIDS for United Nations employees and their families produced by WHO and identifying in the field local sources experienced in HIV/AIDS counselling, to provide confidential follow-up. The staff of the Joint Medical Service will be fully informed and involved as appropriate in such staff education programmes. They will receive any additional professional education that may be required and all pertinent information material on HIV and AIDS, supplied and updated by WHO, will be available through them at all duty stations.

2. All WHO staff members and their families will be made aware of where safe blood may be obtained.

To accomplish this task, the WHO Global Blood Safety Initiative, in cooperation with the United Nations Medical Service, will establish and regularly update a list of reliable and operational blood transfusion centres for circulation to WHO headquarters, regional offices and field duty stations. The Joint Medical Service will also make efforts to ensure that blood transfusions are performed only when absolutely necessary.

3. WHO Representatives will, as far as possible, seek to minimize injury from motor vehicle accidents in the WHO community, not only because of their attendant high mortality and morbidity, but because they present a particular risk for HIV infection in those localities lacking safe blood supplies. WHO Representatives are, therefore, encouraged to consider the following measures for reinforcement or for general adoption if not already applied and to circulate them to all personnel at the duty station together with instructions on the use of public transport:

- the fitting of and compulsory use of seat belts in all WHO vehicles;
- proper training in on- and off-road use of four-wheel drive vehicles by all professional staff and official drivers;
- prohibition against staff members driving official vehicles on duty when an official driver is available;
- provision of and compulsory use of helmets for all riders of motorbikes;
- prohibition against alcohol and drug abuse by vehicle drivers;
- organization of first-aid training sessions; and
- equipment of WHO vehicles with first-aid kits.

4. All WHO staff members and their families will have access to disposable syringes and needles.

The Joint Medical Service will provide disposable syringes and needles to staff on duty travel to areas where there is no guarantee of the proper sterilization of such materials. They will be accompanied by a certificate in all United Nations official languages explaining the reasons why they are being carried. Regional offices and other duty stations will stock disposable injection material for the use of WHO staff and their families. This stock will be available at United Nations dispensaries, where such exist, or at the WHO duty station in the country.

5. All WHO staff members and their families will have access to condoms.

Condoms will be available through UNFPA and/or WHO at those duty stations where there is not a reliable and consistent supply of high quality condoms from the private sector. Access will be free, simple and discreet.

B. VOLUNTARY TESTING, COUNSELLING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Voluntary testing with pre- and post-counselling and assured confidentiality will be made available to all WHO staff members and their families.

Adequate and confidential facilities for voluntary and confirmatory testing and counselling will be made available locally to WHO staff members and their families, with United Nations bodies acting in close collaboration with the United Nations Medical Service and WHO. Specific procedures will be developed by United Nations bodies to maintain confidentiality with respect to negative as well as positive results from an HIV test, including whether such a test has been taken. Only the person tested has the right to release information concerning his/her HIV status.

C. TERMS OF APPOINTMENT AND SERVICE

Pre-recruitment and Employment Prospects

1. The only medical criterion for recruitment is fitness to work.
2. HIV infection does not, in itself, constitute a lack of fitness to work.
3. There will be no HIV screening of candidates for recruitment.
4. AIDS will be treated as any other medical condition in considering medical classification.

5. HIV testing with the specific and informed consent of the candidate may be requested if clinically indicated.
6. Nothing in the pre-employment examination or in the relevant application or health forms should be considered as obliging any candidate to declare his or her HIV status.
7. For a country which requires HIV testing for an assignment, this requirement must appear in the vacancy notice.

Continuity of Employment

1. HIV infection or AIDS will not, of itself, be considered a basis for termination of employment.

If fitness to work is impaired by HIV-related illness then reasonable alternative working arrangements will be made.

2. WHO staff members with HIV or AIDS will enjoy health and social protection in the same manner as other WHO employees suffering from serious illness.

(a) HIV/AIDS screening, whether direct (HIV testing), indirect (assessment of risk behaviour) or asking questions about tests already taken, will not be required.

(b) Confidentiality regarding all medical information, including HIV/AIDS status will be maintained.

(c) There will be no obligation on the part of the employee to inform the employer regarding his or her HIV/AIDS status.

(d) Persons in the workplace affected by, or perceived to be affected by HIV/AIDS, will be protected from stigmatization and discrimination.

(e) HIV-infected employees and those with AIDS will not be discriminated against, including access to and receipt of benefits from statutory social security programmes and occupationally related schemes.

The administrative, personnel and financial implications of these principles under terms of appointment and service will be monitored and periodically reviewed.

D. HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS PROGRAMMES

1. Health insurance coverage will be available for all WHO employees regardless of HIV status.

There will be no pre- or post-coverage testing for HIV infection.

2. Health insurance premiums for WHO employees will not be affected by HIV status.

No testing for HIV infection will be permitted with respect to any health insurance scheme.