

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS can affect anyone. Exposure to HIV infection in the majority of cases is the result of high risk behaviour. While HIV/AIDS has a higher prevalence amongst certain groups, HIV infection is not restricted to particular groups of people.

Workers coping with HIV/AIDS related illness, or with the stress of knowing they are HIV positive, have their problems compounded if they face discrimination in the workplace. The GPMU is opposed to prejudice and discrimination against workers with HIV/AIDS, or their partners, or workers who are in groups assumed to be at greater risk from HIV/AIDS.

Workplace discrimination takes many forms. The three most common HIV employment problems are those:

- relating to a required HIV test
- as a result of ill health dismissal, and
- in connection with the perceived fear of HIV infection in other workers

GPMU Policy

GPMU policy is that all negotiators at Chapel, Branch and National level should seek agreements with companies to protect the employment rights of members with regard to HIV/AIDS.

1. It should be the right of the individual to volunteer information;
2. Any reference to AIDS/HIV be removed from employment application forms;
3. Members with AIDS or who are HIV positive should be respected and treated in a sympathetic, fair and supportive manner.

To this end Branches and Chapels should seek to amend equal opportunities clauses in agreements to include the wording:

"All workers will be treated equally regardless of their HIV antibody status, assumed HIV antibody status, or relationship to someone who is HIV antibody positive."

In addition a number of clear principles need to be agreed by employers to prevent discrimination against persons who have AIDS or are HIV antibody positive.

Risks at Work

There is no risk to fellow workers or the public from normal social contact with an HIV antibody positive person.

In the case of accidents in the workplace involving blood spillage, normal hygiene precautions will minimise the risks of all blood-to-blood infections, including HIV, but also other more infectious diseases like Hepatitis B.

Confidentiality

Job applicants, or employees, will not be required to inform the employer of their HIV antibody status or if they have AIDS.

Strict confidentiality must be maintained if it becomes known that a worker is HIV antibody positive or has AIDS. Any breach of confidentiality will be subject to disciplinary action.

Testing and Screening

Job applicants, or employees, will not be required to take a test for HIV antibodies, or any similar HIV related test.

Recruitment and Dismissal

Applicants deemed to be fit at the time of interview must not be refused an offer of work because of their HIV antibody status or because they have AIDS.

No employee will be dismissed simply because they have HIV/AIDS.

Time Off

Adequate time off will be allowed for medical treatment and counselling for those with HIV/AIDS.

Compassionate leave should include provision for workers who are caring for people with AIDS.

Alternative Employment

Workers with HIV/AIDS will only be redeployed to alternative employment at their own request.

The employer must recognise that continued employment for a worker with HIV/AIDS can help maintain confidence and social contact and enable a person to live with HIV/AIDS with more dignity.

Continued Employment

There is no reason why someone who has HIV cannot continue to work normally as long as they are fit to do so. If they later become ill they should be treated like anyone else with a life-threatening illness.