

SHEA Summary: OSHA RFI on Infectious Disease Standard

This OSHA RFI has potential for a new Infectious Disease Standard, was published in the Federal Register May 6, 2010 and addressed occupational exposure to infectious diseases in a variety of healthcare settings.

Purpose:

To gather information on exposures and how employers are reducing these exposures.

Due Date for Comments:

August 4, 2010

Background:

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) last month issued a Request for Information (RFI) on exposure to infectious diseases in healthcare or related settings.

OSHA's objective is to gather additional information to better characterize the nature and extent of occupationally-acquired infectious diseases and the strategies that are used to mitigate the risk of such exposures in healthcare and healthcare-related settings. OSHA is seeking information on infectious diseases spread through the *air, droplets and contact routes*. However, because OSHA has a bloodborne pathogen standard in place, the agency is not seeking information related to bloodborne pathogens.

The RFI consists of 39 detailed questions grouped in the following categories:

- Employer infection prevention and control plans and methods;
- Vaccination and post-exposure prophylaxis;
- Training and communication of hazards;
- Medical surveillance and recordkeeping;
- The economic impacts and benefits of infection prevention and control; and
- The economic impact of OSHA actions on small entities.

OSHA intends to use the information collected to *“determine what action, if any, the Agency may take to further limit the spread of occupationally-acquired infectious diseases in settings where healthcare is provided.”* If OSHA determines further action is warranted, the agency could:

1. Move forward with a new regulation.
2. Enhance enforcement activities (e.g., as done now with TB using the General Duty and Respiratory Protection standards, after OSHA withdrew the TB standard).
3. Provide additional guidance or compliance assistance.
4. Take no further action.

Scope:

For this RFI, OSHA is interested in all settings where care is provided (hospitals, free standing clinics, home health, EMS, dentists, embedded clinics (e.g. school nurse, correctional facilities) and related settings such as laboratories that handle biological materials, mortuaries, and medical examiner offices. However, to justify a new standard in every setting, *OSHA will need to show that an additional standard beyond the bloodborne pathogen standard as well as other standards noted above is necessary and that there is a material deterioration of health in those settings.*