



## ADVISORY NO. BBIO – 1

[Please file in your ACO Practitioner Manual in the “Advisories” Section]

**Date:** January 1, 2008

**Subject:** OPTOMETRISTS DIAGNOSED WITH BLOOD  
BOURNE INFECTIONS

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*The information contained in this advisory is designed to aid practitioners about appropriate care and should not be interpreted as formal legal advice. Although, it is unrealistic to expect or offer any absolute guarantee of safety, the Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) believes in a balanced position of protecting the public interest, safeguarding the human rights of patients and optometrists and promoting effective infection control techniques.*

In 1995, the Premier established the Transmission of HIV and Other Blood Borne Infectious Diseases in Health Care Settings Review Committee. Subsequent to the final report of this committee, an Expert Review Panel was established for consideration and advice to any health care worker who has developed a blood borne infections. This expert panel has recently been reconstituted by the Minister of Health & Wellness.

It is the policy of the Council of the Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) that any optometrist who believes they may have been infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) or Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) must seek the advice of the Provincial Expert Review Panel. This panel can be contacted through the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta at (780) 4223-4764 or 1-800-561-3899. There is no charge for a review and the health care practitioner can be self-referred, referred from their regulatory college or referred from the Public Health Officer.

Following a review, should any practice restrictions on health care workers be required, they usually include strict aseptic techniques and standard infection control precautions including hand-washing, protective barriers and extreme care in the use and disposal of needles and sharps.

Specifically, the policy of the ACO is as follows:

**A. HIV Infection**

- Mandatory screening of optometrists for HIV is not recommended nor required. Testing should be voluntary with appropriate safeguards for confidentiality and with comprehensive pre and post-test counseling.
- Any optometrist who may have been exposed to HIV by personal risk behavior, receipt of unscreened blood products or occupational accident must obtain appropriate testing and counseling.
- The potential ramifications of an optometrist becoming HIV infected through patient contact must not be used to justify denying service to anyone based only on the patient's HIV positivity.
- Because it would not enhance public safety, the ACO believes that optometrists should not be required to inform their patients, employers or other health care workers that they are HIV positive. The ACO supports the policy that HIV infected optometrists have the same rights of confidentiality as any patient seeking or receiving medical care.

**B. Hepatitis B Virus and/or Hepatitis C Virus Infection**

- All optometrists should be immunized against HBV at the earliest stage in their careers, preferably prior to clinical training. A safe and highly effective vaccine for HBV immunization has been available since 1982.
- The fact of HBV and/or HCV infection alone must not be used to deny any individual entry to an optometry school; rather, emphasis should be placed upon individualized career counseling for HBV and/or HCV infected students.
- All optometrists are encouraged to learn their HBV and/or HCV status if their practice involves invasive patient contact.
- When acute HBV infection is recognized, optometrists must refrain from invasive patient contact until the optometrist is no longer HBsAg-positive.
- The potential ramifications of an optometrist becoming HBV and/or HCV infected through patient contact must not be used to justify denying service to anyone based only on the patient's HBV and/or HCV positivity.
- Tears are not implicated unless they are contaminated with blood.
- The Public Health Act of Alberta requires that the Minister of Health is informed of all HBV and HCV infected health care workers.