

# Improving health workers' access to HIV and TB prevention, treatment, care and support services



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**ABSTRACT:** The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) jointly developed policy guidelines for improving health workers' access to HIV and TB prevention, treatment, care and support services. These 14-point policy guidelines support the key principles of the International Labour Standard concerning HIV and AIDS in the world of work adopted in 2010. The joint guidelines cover issues on workers' rights, national legislation and social protection of health workers. In addition, the guidelines provide framework for workplace policies, programmes, and training. To ensure proper implementation, the guidelines also addressed issues of budget, monitoring and evaluation. Turning these policy guidelines into effective practice would require advocacy to both the health and labour sectors, as well as the recognition of the important roles of health workers, employers of health services, and that of the Ministries of Health and Ministries of Labour.

The health sector has a vital responsibility in helping realize people's fundamental rights to health. The health services employers and management must protect the health and rights of their own workers in order to ensure the public could benefit from optimal health services.

Many countries are currently facing a severe shortage in their health workforce. Increasing workloads of the personnel in healthcare facilities and resource-constrained working conditions lead to great challenges in recruitment and retention of qualified health workers. This situation is further aggravated in countries that are particularly affected by dual epidemics of Human immunodeficiency virus and Tuberculosis. The high rate of HIV-TB co-infection in these countries drives an increasing demand on health services. It also increases the HIV and TB burden on health workers who are particularly exposed to both infections on a daily basis in their work environment.

Although health workers are at the frontline of responding to HIV and TB care needs of people, they have to deal with their own fears of contracting both HIV and TB because of their work exposures. The situation is aggravated by the fact that health workers themselves often do not have adequate access to HIV and TB services. They face stigma and discrimination as well as loss of

their employment, in the events they become infected.

In response to this situation, the ILO and WHO jointly developed a 14-point HIV-TB policy guidelines on how to ensure the access of all health workers to HIV and TB prevention, treatment, care and support services.

The guidelines have a solid base of evidence resulting from systematic literature reviews, studies of current practices in 21 countries, and international expert consultations organised by both the WHO and ILO.

**FIGURE 1: COLLABORATION BETWEEN WHO AND ILO ON PROTECTING HEALTH WORKERS FROM OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE TO BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS**

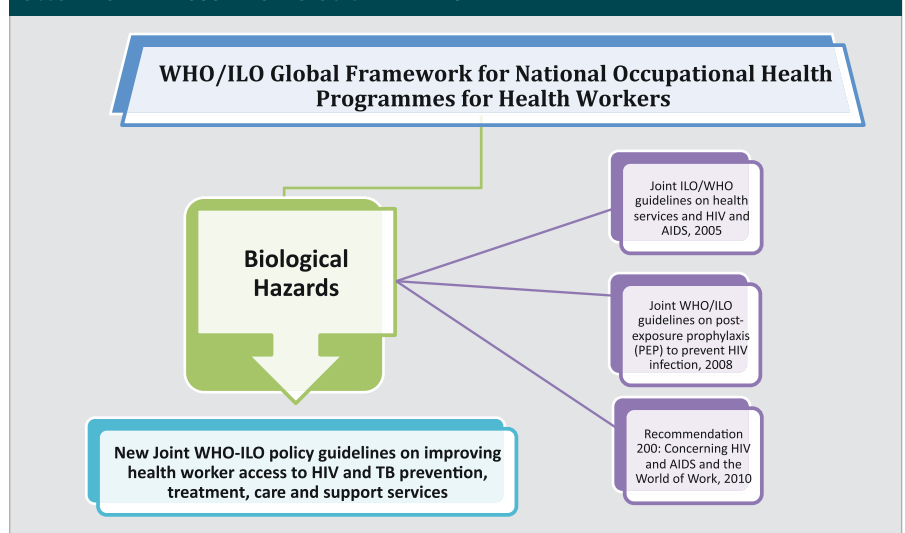


TABLE 1: THE 14-POINT JOINT POLICY GUIDELINES

**Strengthening national policies, laws and strategies through TREAT**

Introduce new or refine existing national policies that ensure priority access for health workers and their families to services for the prevention, treatment and care for HIV and TB.

Introduce new or reinforce existing policies that prevent discrimination against health workers with HIV or TB, and adopt interventions aimed at stigma reduction among colleagues and supervisors.

Establish schemes for reasonable accommodation and compensation, including, as appropriate, paid leave, early retirement benefits and death benefits in the event of occupationally-acquired disease.

**Enhancing workplace policies, programmes and trainings**

Develop, strengthen or expand existing basic occupational health services for the entire health workforce so that access to HIV and TB prevention, treatment and care can be realized.

Develop or strengthen existing infection control programmes, especially with respect to TB and HIV infection control, and collaborate with workplace health and safety programmes to ensure a safer work environment.

Develop, implement and extend programmes for regular, free, voluntary, and confidential counselling and testing of HIV, and TB screening, including addressing reproductive health issues, as well as intensified case finding in the families of health workers with TB.

Adapt and implement good practices in occupational health and the management of HIV and TB in the workplace from both public and private health care sectors, as well as other sectors.

Provide information on benefits and risks of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to all staff and provide free and timely PEP for all exposed health workers, ensuring appropriate training of PEP providers.

Provide free HIV and TB treatment for health workers in need, facilitating the delivery of these services in a non-stigmatizing, gender-sensitive, confidential, and convenient setting when there is no staff clinic and/or their own facility does not offer ART, or where health workers prefer services off-site.

In the context of preventing co-morbidity, provide universal availability of a comprehensive package of prevention and care for all HIV positive health workers, including isoniazid prophylactic treatment and co-trimoxazole prophylaxis, with appropriate information on benefits and risks.

Develop and implement training programmes for all health workers: pre-service, in-service and continuing education on TB and HIV prevention, treatment and care; workers' rights and stigma reduction, integrating these into existing training programmes and including managers and worker representatives.

**Budgeting, monitoring and evaluation**

Establish and provide adequate financial resources for prevention, treatment, care and support programmes to prevent the occupational or non-occupational transmission of HIV and TB among health workers.

Develop and implement mechanisms for monitoring the availability of the guidelines at the national level, as well as the dissemination of these policies and their application in the healthcare setting.

Disseminate the policies related to these guidelines in the form of codes of practices and other accessible formats for application at the level of health facilities, and ensure provision of budgets for the training and material inputs to make them operational.

The guidelines aim to protect health workers and empower them to respond to the threat of HIV and TB infections. Implementing these guidelines could improve retention of health workers and prevent the loss of health workforce due to infection with HIV, TB or death.

The guidelines complement and reinforce guidelines previously developed by WHO and ILO on TB infection control<sup>9</sup> and HIV in the workplace<sup>4,5</sup>, health-systems strengthening<sup>6</sup>, post-exposure prophylaxis<sup>7,8,5</sup>, clinical diagnoses and treatment for HIV and TB<sup>10</sup>, reproductive health<sup>11</sup>, and occupational health<sup>12-14</sup>.

TABLE 2: HOW ILO AND WHO WORK TOGETHER TO PROTECT HEALTH WORKER

**How ILO and WHO work together to protect health worker**

ILO and WHO have a long-standing collaboration on HIV and AIDS responses, as co-sponsors of the UNAIDS and in occupational health.

In June 2004 the Governing Body of the ILO decided on conducting a joint tripartite meeting of experts with the WHO on HIV and AIDS in Health Sector and subsequently, in April 2005, the Joint ILO/WHO guidelines on health services and HIV and AIDS were adopted by the meeting. In September 2005, the WHO and ILO called together another joint tripartite expert consultation to develop a joint WHO/ILO guidelines on post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection. This second joint guidelines was published in 2008.

In 2006, in response to the crisis in human resources for health, WHO, in collaboration with ILO, conducted a sequence of formal consultations with ILO constituents that includes representatives of workers, employers and governments, as well as other stakeholders and partners. The process of guidelines development also included a 21-country study on health workers' access to HIV and tuberculosis health services. This initiative originated from the Treat, Train and Retain (TREAT) strategy jointly launched by WHO, ILO and International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2006 to support scale-up of HIV and AIDS services towards Universal Access and address the impact of HIV on the health workforce. In September 2009, an international WHO/ILO consultation on policy guidelines to improve health workers' access to prevention, treatment and care services for HIV and TB took place in Geneva. And in July 2010, a joint ILO-WHO tripartite expert consultation endorsed these policy guidelines.

The purpose of the guidelines is to give coherence to a compilation of existing clinical and policy guidelines to improve health workers' access to HIV and TB prevention, treatment, care and support services. Moreover, the new guidelines fill in the gaps of previous guidelines, for instance they address specifically need to protect health workers from contracting TB in the workplace and the need for TB infection control.

The target audience of the new policy guidelines are policy makers in the ministries of health and of labour; public and private health sector employers and senior management; occupational and infection control practitioners; all health workers, their associations or unions.

The joint guidelines cover:

- ✦ national frameworks including rights, other legislation and social protection schemes;
- ✦ workplace actions including policies, programmes and training;
- ✦ budget, monitoring and evaluation involving national and workplace coordination.

In line with the 2006 *WHO World Health Report*, the 2010 joint ILO-WHO guidelines are based on a broad definition of "health workers" which includes the providers of health services such as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, as well as management and support workers in healthcare settings such as finance officers, administrators, cooks, drivers, cleaners and security guards<sup>1</sup>. The policy guidelines cover health workers employed at all types of facilities, including acute-care, long-term care, community-based care, home-care and informal caregivers or providers of health services in other sectors.

The guidelines illustrate for the health sector the fundamental rights and principles contained in the ILO Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work, 2010, No. 200, by promoting, among others:

- ✦ workers' rights;
- ✦ gender equity;
- ✦ the active participation of health workers, their representatives and health sector employers;

- + the involvement of people living with HIV or TB;
- + prevention;
- + effectiveness and efficiency.

The joint policy guidelines have been agreed to by the tripartite constituents of ILO and approved by the *Guidelines Review Committee* of WHO. The guidelines were adopted by the Governing Body of the ILO in November 2010. They are officially launched as part of the World AIDS Day celebration 2010. WHO and ILO encourage all their global partners to disseminate and implement this set of guidelines. For instance, to incorporate the joint ILO-WHO policy guidelines for health workers into the International Hospital Federations' Positive Practice Environment campaign.

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