

Policy on the Use of Human Cell Lines for Laboratory Personnel

Introduction

Human cell lines are commonly used in biomedical research, yet appropriate biosafety requirements for handling human cell lines are often subject to debate within the scientific community. In order to clarify the University's position on this matter, the Institutional Biosafety Committee has created the following policy.

Background

In 1991, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued the Bloodborne Pathogens (BBP) Standard to protect employees who have occupational exposure to human blood or other potentially infectious materials. While human blood, most body fluids, unfixed human tissues and organs were clearly included within the scope and application of the standard, the inclusion of human cell lines was ambiguous.

In 1994, OSHA issued an interpretation of the applicability of the BBP Standard towards human cell lines. According to the interpretation, human cell lines are considered to be potentially infectious and within the scope of the BBP Standard unless the specific cell line has been characterized to be free of hepatitis viruses, HIV, Epstein-Barr virus, papilloma viruses and other recognized bloodborne pathogens.¹ In alignment with this interpretation, the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC) recommends that all human cell lines be accorded the same level of biosafety consideration as a line known to carry HIV.² Moreover, Appendix H of the 5th Edition of the CDC publ