



Weekly Safety Topic

Bloodborne Pathogens

Protection from BBP

Sometimes your job may put your own health at risk. If you were asked whether you are protected on your job by OSHA's bloodborne pathogens (BBP) standard, would you understand the question?

When most people think about bloodborne pathogens, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) immediately comes to mind. What they don't realize is that the hepatitis B (HBV) and C viruses, causing deadly diseases of the liver, are transmitted much more easily, especially through needlesticks.

A pathogen is a specific cause of disease, such as a virus or bacteria, and "bloodborne" means it is carried by or in blood. HIV and HBV can also be contracted by exposure to body fluids such as semen, vaginal secretions, amniotic fluid, and other liquids in the body, saliva (in dental procedures), and any unfixed human tissue. There are facts involving bloodborne pathogens that are misunderstood or not widely known by the general public, such as:

- Hepatitis B is almost completely preventable through vaccination.
- Hepatitis C, another serious bloodborne liver disease, carries a much higher risk of infection than that with HIV. Unfortunately, like HIV, there is no vaccine against this disease.
- Once someone is exposed to a bloodborne pathogen, there are drug therapies that can help prevent the viruses from multiplying.

There are certain occupations that involve a much greater risk of exposure to these viruses. These include health care workers; garbage collectors; mortuary workers; law enforcement, fire, and other public safety personnel; laboratory technicians; professional emergency responders; medical equipment repair persons; and laundry workers in clinical facilities. Anyone with part-time responsibility for providing in-house first aid and CPR services is also covered by these guidelines.

OSHA's bloodborne pathogens standard provides employers with guidance on how these workers are to be trained and protected.


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If your job carries the risk of exposure, there are definite steps you and your employer can take to minimize it. These controls are known as "universal precautions." For those who work in hospitals, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends following "standard precautions" that expand to reduce of risks of infection by microorganisms.

People may be infected with HIV or hepatitis B or C without knowing it, so it is important to consider all human blood or body fluids as potentially infectious. Here are the procedures that should be used at all times:

- **Use extreme caution** in everything you do at work.
- **Be vaccinated against hepatitis B.** OSHA requires that your employer provide this service for you at no cost if you are likely to be exposed to the virus.
- **Pay careful attention at the training sessions provided by your employer.**
- **Ask to see your employer's exposure control plan.** It is a written document that describes which jobs involve potential exposure to bloodborne pathogens and what plan the employer has in place to limit or eliminate that exposure. It is important for you to understand exactly what procedures should be followed at your particular worksite.
- **Always use the personal protective equipment (PPE)** provided for you when handling blood or body fluids, since any opening on your body or skin—eyes, mouth, skin rash, or cut—is a route of entry for pathogens. PPE may include disposable, single-use gloves; masks, face shields, or goggles, or protective eyewear with side shields; and lab coats, gowns, and similar protective clothing, including caps, hoods, and protective shoe covers or boots. Check disposable gloves for tears or punctures before using them. Bandage cuts or broken skin before putting on gloves.
- **Don't keep food or drink in work areas and don't eat, drink, smoke, apply cosmetics, or handle contact lenses in areas with exposure potential.**
- **Avoid bending, breaking, or recapping used needles.** If recapping is necessary, use a one-handed technique. Immediately dispose of used needles and other sharps in designated, puncture-resistant containers labeled with the bright orange or orange/red biohazard symbol.
- **Wipe up blood or body fluid spills immediately.** Use the disinfectant provided for this specific use.
- **Use a brush and dust pan, tongs, or forceps to pick up potentially contaminated glass or other debris.** Don't use your hands!
- **Double-bag infectious waste if the outside of the first bag has been contaminated by blood or body fluids.**
- **Remove protective clothing immediately after you leave the work area.** Place it in the proper receptacles for laundering or decontamination.

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- **Discard disposable gloves and masks in designated containers**, which should be labeled "biohazard."
 - **Wash your hands after removing gloves.** Use a disposable towel for turning on the faucets to avoid cross-contamination.
 - **Don't suction or pipette potentially infectious materials with your mouth.**
 - **If you need to perform CPR, use a one-way-valve mask.** Use disposable airway equipment and resuscitation masks.

Suppose, despite all of your efforts, you have been exposed to another person's blood or body fluids. Take immediate action by washing all exposed areas of your body with lots of soap and water. If necessary, flush your eyes, nose, and mouth with water.

Then report the incident to your supervisor immediately. Early action can begin an investigation to determine if you were actually exposed to any disease. Your employer will offer you a confidential medical evaluation and blood test. There are early medical treatments that can prevent the development of hepatitis B and slow the onset of a potential HIV infection. Your employer will also provide counseling services for you.

While chances of infection on the job are small, why take unnecessary risks with your life? Always being careful and following universal precautions are the best ways to minimize that risk.