Beware of Bloodborne Pathogens



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Nearly any worker could encounter bloodborne pathogens – whether bandaging a co-worker's cut, stepping on a used hypodermic needle in the alley or helping an accident victim on the way home.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

The viruses that cause certain diseases are spread by contact with blood and some other bodily fluids. Bloodborne diseases include:

- HIV, which causes AIDS, an immune system failure;
- HBV, which causes Hepatitis B, a liver disease; and
- HCV, which causes Hepatitis C, also a liver disease.

EXAMPLES

You could be exposed by being pricked by a used needle or other medical sharp, or exposed while giving first aid – if infected blood enters your body through your eyes, mouth, nose or skin cut.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Find out if your employer has a written safety plan. An important part of such plans is known as "standard precautions" or "universal precautions". This means dealing with all human blood and other bodily fluids as if they contained deadly viruses, even if they don't. Methods of isolating hazards may be part of a safety plan, such as safe disposal containers for sharps, such as needles. Use tongs or brushes to clean up debris containing sharp items, even if you are wearing gloves. Never pick up broken glass with your hands. Wear the personal protective equipment (PPE) you are instructed to use, if your job exposes you to bodily fluids. This could include gloves, gowns or lab coats, goggles with side shields, face shields and respiratory protection. Clean and decontaminate any equipment and surfaces that may have had contact with infectious materials. If someone's blood gets on your clothing, try to handle that laundry as little as possible and wear gloves (If you work in a healthcare facility, you either consider all laundry contaminated or use specifically marked receptacles for

storing contaminated laundry before sending it out for washing and cleaning). If you are exposed to a bloodborne pathogen:

- Wash needlestick sites or cuts with soap and water.
- Flush with water any bodily fluid splashes to the nose, mouth or skin.
- Irrigate your eyes with clean water, saline solution or sterile irrigants.
- Report the exposure to your supervisor immediately so treatment can be started without delay.

FINAL WORD

You can’t see the viruses that cause AIDS and hepatitis. You just have to assume they are present in blood and protect yourself from contact.