Protect Yourself Against Bloodborne Pathogens



Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

Bloodborne pathogens are infectious agents that can cause illness and death. HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C are the three most common bloodborne pathogens you will encounter in most workplace scenarios. Exposure to bloodborne pathogens can occur in almost every type of occupation. This includes factory worker, construction workers, medical and laboratory personnel and janitorial and facilities staff.

What's the Danger?

You are at risk for contracting a bloodborne pathogen if blood or contaminated body fluid from an infected person enters your bloodstream. Transmission at work is most likely to occur from:

- Blood getting into the mucous membranes of your eyes, nose or mouth; often the result of a splash or spray of blood;
- A needle stick from a contaminated needle or puncture from a contaminated sharp like a razor or broken glass; or
- Blood or contaminated body fluids entering your body through an open wound, cut, acne or rash.

Normal day-to-day contact ***does not*** present a risk for occupational exposure.

How to Protect Yourself

Protecting yourself against bloodborne pathogen exposure is simple.

First, follow your employer's safe work practices and standard 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.

Second, practice safe handling and disposal methods. This includes using appropriate disposal containers for sharps, such as needles and broken glass. Remember, never pick up broken glass with your hands. Instead, use tongs or

brushes to clean up debris containing sharp items, even if you are wearing gloves.

Third, clean and decontaminate any equipment and surfaces that may have had contact with infectious materials.

Fourth, 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, face shields and respiratory protection.

Finally, if you are exposed to a bloodborne pathogen follow these three steps:

1. Wash the area, site or cut with soap and water.

2. Flush with water any bodily fluid splashes to the eyes, nose, mouth or skin.

3. Report the exposure to your supervisor and immediately seek medical treatment.

Final Word

Take the fear out of bloodborne pathogens. Follow universal precautions, follow safe work practices, wear required PPE and clean up contaminated equipment and areas to protect yourself against bloodborne diseases.