

## SAFETY COMMUNICATION

# Bloodborne Pathogens

### *Infection Control in the Workplace*

Depending on your job duties, you could have an occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens (BBP). BBPs are micro-organisms that may be present in human blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) and can cause disease in humans. Although there are many types of BBPs, the most common types are:

- HIV
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C

It's important to remember not all blood or OPIM will carry these harmful pathogens. However, you can't take that chance, so you must treat them all as if they are infectious.

If you have an occupational exposure, your employer may have a written program and implement practices and procedures to reduce or eliminate the hazard to you.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Hepatitis B is the most infectious BBP. It causes inflammation of the liver and can survive outside the body for up to a week. It can cause flu-like symptoms, abdominal pain, jaundice, dark urine, and clay-colored stools.
- Hepatitis C causes liver disease, and there is no current treatment or vaccine available at an affordable cost. The virus does not survive well outside the body. It can cause pain on the right side of the abdomen, jaundice, fatigue, appetite loss, nausea, dark-colored urine, and pale stools.
- HIV attacks the body's immune system and causes AIDS. There is no cure or vaccine available, and it can sometimes take up to 10 years or more to develop symptoms. It can cause flu-like symptoms, night sweats or fever, weight loss, fatigue, swollen glands, and AIDS-related illnesses

### TRANSMISSION MODES

BBPs can be spread in variety of ways; however, the most common ways for workers are by:

- Needle sticks or other sharps
- Providing first aid
- Clean up or control of blood or OPIM
- Through broken skin
- Through mucous membranes (nose, eyes, mouth)

### THINGS TO AVOID

When there is a possibility of exposure to BBPs, you should avoid eating, drinking, smoking, touching contact lenses, and applying make-up or lip balm until you have thoroughly washed your hands. You should also avoid things like reaching into areas that you cannot see, packing down trash with your hands, reaching blindly in a trash container or debris pile, or any other activity that could cause transmission of BBPs.

Examples of job classifications in which all employees have an occupational exposure:

- Firefighters
- EMTs / Paramedics
- Police
- Lifeguards
- Nurses

Examples of job classifications in which some employees have an occupational exposure:

- Housekeepers
- Playground Supervisors
- Teachers
- Public Works
- Parks & Recreation Workers
- Maintenance Workers

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## *Infection Control in the Workplace*

### HANDWASHING

Washing your hands after handling blood or body fluids is critical in preventing the spread of BBPs. When washing your hands, follow these steps:

- Use soap and warm water
- Scrub vigorously for at least 20 seconds
- Use a single-use towel or air blower to dry

If you don't have immediate access to handwashing facilities, you can use hand sanitizers or moist towelettes. But, remember these are not a substitute for proper handwashing. You must still wash your hands with soap and water as soon as possible.

### UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

Taking universal precautions whenever there is a potential for a BBP exposure is essential for preventing the spread of BBPs. That means you should always protect your hands, face, and body when working around sources of BBPs. Disposable nitrile, rubber, or latex gloves; goggles; and face shields and protective clothing all are ways you can avoid exposure to BBPs.

When handling sharps, such as hypodermic needles or sharp items, that may be contaminated with blood, it's best not to handle them with your bare hands. Use tongs, pliers, broom and dust pan, or any other means that will protect your hands. Remember, always dispose of sharps in a sharps container. Sharps containers must be:

- Rigid
- Puncture resistant
- Leak proof
- Portable
- Labeled
- Closable and sealable



### DECONTAMINATION

Sometimes you may be asked to clean-up a spill. If this happens, spray the area with an

EPA-rated germicide or a 10% bleach solution and allow to stand for 10 minutes after the initial clean-up. Dispose of wipes or towels used in the clean-up process in bio-hazard containers.

**Handwashing Tip:**  
If you're not sure how long 20 seconds is, try singing "Happy Birthday" to yourself two times. That's about 20 seconds.

### REGULATED MEDICAL WASTE

It's imperative that contaminated sharps or contaminated items that could release blood or OPIMs are disposed of in an appropriate manner. These items must be taken to a facility, such as a local hospital or medical facility, for proper disposal.

### HEPATITIS B VACCINATIONS

One way you can protect yourself from acquiring the hepatitis B virus is to get a hepatitis B vaccination. This vaccination is considered to be safe and effective in controlling the virus. The vaccination is a series of three shots administered over a six-month period. There may be some minor side effects for the shot, such as soreness, swelling, or redness at the injection site, but the long-term benefits certainly outweigh the short-term discomfort. If the duties and activities of your job expose you to bloodborne pathogens, your employer may offer you the vaccination at no cost to you.