



Bloodborne Pathogens

Bloodborne pathogens are a huge concern for workers in certain industries, but they should also be a concern to everyone. While not everyone has the risk to be exposed to bloodborne pathogens on a daily basis at their job, there is always a chance that you could into contact with potentially infectious materials. Examples of scenarios include providing first aid after an accident or medical event or cleaning up potentially infectious materials.

What are Bloodborne Pathogens? *(source: OSHA.gov).*

Bloodborne pathogens are infectious microorganisms in human blood that can cause disease in humans. These pathogens include, but are not limited to, hepatitis B (HBV), hepatitis C (HCV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

How Are Individuals Exposed to Bloodborne Pathogens?

Exposure through a needle stick or another sharp object is a common way workers in the healthcare industry, emergency responders, and housekeepers are exposed to bloodborne pathogens. Exposure can also occur when an individual is exposed through contact with infectious materials to the nose, eyes, mouth, or broken skin.

Best Practices to Prevent Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogens

- For workers in the healthcare industry, using a safer sharps device over a traditional needle can result in a huge reduction in exposure through needle sticks. Also correct handling and disposal of sharps is key to preventing exposure.
- Individuals at risk for being exposed to bloodborne pathogens at their job can get a vaccine to prevent the HBV infection for free.
- When dealing with bodily fluids or any potentially infectious materials, use "universal precautions". Using universal precautions means you treat all of these materials as if they contain bloodborne pathogens. Utilizing safe work practices along with the correct PPE to protect yourself is a **large part of using universal precautions.**
- If you are exposed to potentially infectious materials, immediately flush and scrub the exposed area with warm water and soap. Notify a supervisor of the possible exposure and seek medical treatment.

Summary

While you may not work an industry such as healthcare where exposure to bloodborne pathogens is a major concern, you should still be aware of how to prevent exposure. Whether at home or at work, the potential to have to provide first aid or clean up potentially infectious materials in your lifetime is high. Protecting yourself from exposure to bloodborne pathogens needs to be your first concern when dealing with potentially infectious materials.