

## Protecting Against Bloodborne Pathogens

### What are Bloodborne Pathogens?

They are microorganisms in human body blood or body fluid that cause disease in humans. Two bloodborne pathogens which pose a serious health threat if contracted are the hepatitis B virus (HBV), which causes a severe form of Hepatitis in some or acts as a carrier in others, and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS.

### Methods of Transmission

Blood borne pathogens are usually transmitted or passed on when disease organisms enter the body through mucus membranes or through breaks in the skin.

While intact skin offers some protection against blood borne pathogens, pathogens may be transmitted through intact skin via accidental injection with needles, scalpels, and shards of glass or biting. They may also enter the body through open cuts, nicks, skin abrasions and cracked skin caused by various types of dermatitis.

At work, the most common exposure to bloodborne pathogens occurs when an infected worker has an injury causing direct exposure to human blood and the person who comes to help them is not wearing the proper personal protective equipment or practicing universal precautions.

### Universal Precautions

Universal precaution is a method of infection control in which all blood and certain human body fluids are treated as if known to be infectious. Personal protective equipment should be used with universal precautions when dealing with all body fluids.

Qualified, trained first-aiders should be equipped to safeguard against exposure. You should be aware that there is a good possibility that you may have small nicks or cuts on you from previous jobs. These nicks and cuts, in addition to your mouth, nose and eyes are examples of possible entryways for bloodborne pathogens, present in the injured person, to enter your circulatory system.

### Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment, which includes latex gloves, gowns, mouthpieces, resuscitation bags, and face masks can significantly reduce the health risks for workers exposed to blood and other potentially infectious materials. The PPE must be suitable for the level of expected exposure and should be readily accessible to employees and available in appropriate sizes. Employees should be trained on the proper use of PPE and how to respond effectively and safely to an injury.

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## **OSHA'S Bloodborne Pathogen Standard**

OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogen Standard, 29 CFR Part 1910.1030, sets forth requirements to protect workers from occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens. The standard covers all employees who could be reasonably anticipated to face contact with blood and other potentially infectious materials as the result of performing their job duties. OSHA has not attempted to list all occupations where exposures could occur; however, designated first aid providers are, in most cases, covered by the standard.

The standard requires employers to establish a written exposure control plan, which would identify workers with occupational exposure to blood and other potentially infectious material and specify means to protect and train them.

The standard calls for engineering controls such as puncture-resistant containers for used needles; work practice controls such as hand washing to reduce contamination; and personal protective equipment such as gowns and gloves. There are also requirements in the standard for housekeeping procedures, medical surveillance, Hepatitis B vaccination, signs and labels, etc. For more information on OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogen standard consult OSHA 1910.1030 standard available from your local/regional OSHA office.

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