

# Occupational Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogens

## What are Bloodborne Pathogens?

Bloodborne pathogens are microorganisms (e.g., viruses or bacteria) that are present in human blood and that may cause disease in humans. Examples of bloodborne pathogens include the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), hepatitis B virus (HBV) that causes hepatitis B infections, and hepatitis C (HCV) that causes hepatitis C infections. Other bloodborne pathogens include the microorganisms that cause syphilis and malaria. Bloodborne pathogens can be transmitted if blood or certain body fluids (any human body fluid containing visible blood; semen; vaginal secretions; or fluids surrounding internal organs, the joints, or a fetus) from someone infected with a bloodborne pathogen get into the mucous membranes (eyes, nose, mouth) or directly into the bloodstream through skin that is damaged (e.g., scraped, cut, abraded) or punctured (e.g., needle stick injury). HIV, HBV, and HCV are also transmitted sexually and an infected woman can infect her unborn child before or during birth.

## Am I at Risk?

To determine if you are at risk for occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens at your job, answer the following questions. Have I been assigned a task that required me to contact human blood or other body fluids (with or without gloves or face protection)? Have I ever received a splash or spill of human blood or body fluids on my skin or clothing when I was doing a job that I was assigned? Is it possible that I would get human blood or body fluids on my skin or clothing by doing my regular job assignments?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you MAY be at risk. Please talk with your supervisor about your concerns and show them this information sheet. You or your supervisor should call the Biological Safety Section, Division of Research Safety at 333-2755 or [via e-mail](mailto:bss@illinois.edu) at [bss@illinois.edu](mailto:bss@illinois.edu) to get more information and to see if you need to be trained in the proper procedures of working with blood and other body fluids, as required by the Bloodborne Pathogen Standard.

## What is the Bloodborne Pathogen Standard?

In December of 1991, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) of the U.S. Department of Labor, published a final regulation titled, *Occupational Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogens*. OSHA felt that the possibility of U.S. workers acquiring a bloodborne disease such as AIDS or hepatitis B while doing their jobs required special attention. In January 1993 the Illinois Department of Labor adopted the OSHA standard to cover public sector workers in Illinois. The regulation requires employers to determine which of their employees are at risk for contact with human blood and other potentially infectious materials. Training must be provided to those workers on how to protect themselves. The standard also requires employers to offer their at-risk employees a vaccination against hepatitis B infection.

If you are at risk, you will be given training each year. [Annual training](#) will remind you of the proper procedures to use and the trainer will be able to answer any questions that you may have regarding bloodborne pathogens or the procedures to protect yourself. REMEMBER: reading this information sheet is not a substitute for training. State regulations require that you receive training if you are at risk because of your job assignments.



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## What can I do to protect myself?

If you are at risk and receive training, you will learn about ways to protect yourself from exposure to blood and certain body fluids. Some of these protective measures involve using special equipment or wearing protective clothing or coverings (such as gloves or vinyl aprons). Other measures involve practicing good habits such as proper hand washing and cleaning of work surfaces. You will also be offered a vaccination series against hepatitis B virus. This vaccination will decrease your susceptibility to HBV infection if you are exposed to the virus.

## How can I tell if something's infectious?

You can't! Many people that are infected with bloodborne pathogens don't even know that they have an infection. Their blood and some body fluids (any human body fluid containing visible blood; semen; vaginal secretions; or fluids surrounding internal organs, the joints, or a fetus) are still infectious even if they don't feel sick. One of the concepts that you will be taught in training is called "universal precautions". Practicing universal precautions means that you treat all human blood and some body fluids as if they are contaminated with bloodborne pathogens. Body fluids that do not require the practice of universal precautions are sweat, sputum, saliva, urine, feces, vomit, or tears UNLESS these body fluids are contaminated with visible blood.

## What happens if I'm exposed?

If you get blood or other potentially infectious materials on your skin, mucous membranes, or clothing, you should wash the exposed area gently but thoroughly or remove your soiled clothing. Report this exposure to your supervisor. If you have gotten blood or other potentially infectious materials in your eyes, nose, or mouth or if you have damaged skin in the area where the blood got on your skin, you will receive a medical evaluation to determine if there is any possibility that you will become infected. A qualified healthcare professional will provide you with treatment and information regarding your risks of infection.

## Where can I get more information?

Please contact the Biological Safety Section, Division of Research Safety at 333-2755 or [via e-mail at bss@illinois.edu](mailto:bss@illinois.edu) for additional information on bloodborne pathogens and how occupationally exposed employees can register for training sessions.

## Questions?

Contact the Division of Research Safety, Biological Safety Section (333-2755 or [via e-mail at bss@illinois.edu](mailto:bss@illinois.edu)) or visit our web site at <http://www.drs.illinois.edu/bss/>.

Other Biosafety Fact Sheets are available from the Biological Safety Section at our web site: <http://www.drs.illinois.edu/bss/factsheets/>.

