

BLOODBORNE PATHOGENS

A training handbook from the
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INTRODUCTION

Concerns about AIDS in the workplace are voiced every day in schools. Yet AIDS isn't the only bloodborne threat in the workplace. In fact, you're more likely to be infected in the line of duty by the hepatitis B virus (HBV), which is just as deadly. Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Unlike AIDS, hepatitis B can often be treated successfully. In fact, a vaccine is now available to help protect you against getting the hepatitis B virus. This virus is more contagious and much more common than the AIDS virus. It is estimated that about 1 out of 250 people in the U.S. are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV. About 1 out of 20 are infected with HBV, the hepatitis B virus.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has issued a standard that is designed to protect you. It details ways that you and your employer can work together to substantially reduce your risk of contracting a bloodborne disease on the job. You are covered by the standard if it is reasonably anticipated that you could be exposed to bloodborne pathogens as a result of performing your job duties. The three most significant blood-borne diseases that you could be exposed to on the job are hepatitis B (HBV), Hepatitis C and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). This handbook is about Hepatitis B.

Another disease in the hepatitis family, Hepatitis A, is not considered one of the primary bloodborne diseases, but is transmitted through ingestion of contaminated food or water.

Hepatitis A and B both have a vaccine to prevent diseases. Hepatitis C does not have a preventive vaccine at this time.

HBV infection is common in certain high-risk groups who have frequent and/or routine exposure to blood or serous fluids. HBV is a serious infection that may severely damage the liver.

HBV

Hepatitis means "inflammation of the liver". Hepatitis B virus (HBV) is the major infectious bloodborne hazard you face on the job. If you become infected with HBV:

- You may suffer from flu-like symptoms becoming so severe that you may require hospitalization.
- You may feel no symptoms at all, feeling as if you were not infected.
- Your blood, saliva and other body fluids may be infectious.
- You may spread the virus to sexual partners, family members, and even unborn infants.

It is impossible to tell who is infected just by looking at a person. Infected persons can be male, female, married, single, gay or straight. They can be students—or staff members. People can carry this disease for many years without showing any symptoms. However, they are still contagious and can unknowingly spread the disease to others.

WORKPLACE TRANSMISSION

HBV and other pathogens may be present in blood and other body fluids (saliva, semen, and vaginal secretions), and can be spread through contact with them. Transmission can also occur through maternal-fetal contact; and a few unknown exposures. Bloodborne pathogens can cause infection by entering your body in a variety of ways, including:

- Open cuts
- Nicks
- Skin abrasions
- Dermatitis
- Acne
- The mucous membranes of your mouth, eyes or nose.

The greatest concern for workplace transmission is with health care workers, but the OSHA standard covers all employees. The risk of getting a bloodborne disease in a school setting is slim but it is very important that individuals be aware of situations that could be potentially dangerous. Some typical circumstances where blood is likely to be encountered include fights, sports injuries, nosebleeds and accidents in shop class, home economics, science labs or any other setting where students use glass or sharp objects.

Any human body substance should be handled carefully because it could be contaminated with other infectious materials.

Indirect transmission, such as touching a contaminated object or surface and transferring the infectious material to your mouth, eyes, nose or open skin can occur with HBV. HBV can survive on surfaces dried and at room temperatures for at least one week.