

RISK CONTROL CONSULTING

Bloodborne Pathogens – What Are They?

Bloodborne pathogens (BBP) are microorganisms that can cause disease when transferred from an infected person to another person through blood or other potentially infected body fluids. The microorganisms can cause serious illness and death. The most common diseases spread in this manner are Hepatitis B (HBV) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Examples of other bloodborne diseases include malaria, hepatitis C and syphilis.

Who is at Risk?

Workers in health care and public safety jobs could be potentially exposed to these disease pathogens. These workers include, but are not limited to, doctors, dentists, nurses, paramedics, police, laboratory workers and housekeeping workers in the health care industry. Needle stick injuries are the most common method of exposure for health care workers. Non-health care workers may become exposed at work while providing help to an injured co-worker and coming in contact with the injured person's blood or body fluids.



How Can You Become Exposed?

Exposure to bloodborne pathogens may occur in many ways. Any kind of opening or break in the skin provides a place for infected blood or fluids to enter your body. Scrapes, cuts, rashes, burns and other minor injuries that create an opening in the skin are entryways for bloodborne pathogens. Your eyes, nose and mouth are mucous membranes, and are also openings for diseases to enter.

Universal Precautions

Universal precautions are methods of protecting yourself from bloodborne pathogens. Universal precautions assume all body fluids are infected with bloodborne pathogens. Universal precautions include:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – to be used at all times to prevent skin or mucous membrane contact with bodily fluids. Always inspect PPE for cracks, holes or other damage. Never use damaged PPE. PPE examples include lab coats, gloves, eye goggles, face shields, etc.
- Wash hands or other skin surfaces thoroughly and immediately if contaminated.
- When using sharp items (scalpels, needles, pipettes, etc.) that may be potentially contaminated, a puncture resistant container must be used for storage and disposal after use.

If you Think You've Been Exposed

If you have come in contact with blood or other potentially infectious bodily fluids, you've been involved in an exposure incident. Stay calm, wash yourself thoroughly, and report to your supervisor right away. Inform your supervisor of how, when, where and whose blood you came in contact with. If you've been involved in an exposure incident, seek medical attention. A medical professional will provide you with appropriate testing, treatment, and education.

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Bloodborne Pathogens Program

In 1991, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) began requiring employers with workers potentially exposed to blood or other infectious materials to establish a Bloodborne Pathogens Program. The purpose of a Bloodborne Pathogens Program is to protect employees from the health hazards associated with bloodborne pathogens and to provide appropriate treatment and counseling should an employee be exposed.

More Information

For more detailed information and updates, visit the website maintained by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration at:

www.osha.gov/SLTC/bloodbornepathogens/

If you have any health concerns or questions, contact your health care provider.

This Tribal First Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice. For more information on this topic, please contact Tribal First Risk Control Consulting at 888-737-4752 or riskcontrol@tribalfirst.com.