

TBT 05/12/2025 Bloodborne Pathogens

Toolbox Talk: Biological Hazards – Be Aware of Bloodborne Pathogens

It is human nature to want to help someone in distress, especially if they are severely ill or bleeding. And while you may feel compelled to assist someone in trauma or just clean up blood or other body fluids after an accident or illness, you must be aware of the potential for contracting a harmful virus from another person's blood or other body fluids.

What we are talking about are viruses known as Bloodborne Pathogens. These pathogens include, but are not limited to, Hepatitis B or C, which can affect your liver, and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, also known as HIV, which attacks the body's immune system and can lead to the development of AIDS. These viruses are harbored in the carrier's blood, and can be transmitted to another person who is exposed to their blood or other body fluids that could contain blood, such as Cerebro-spinal fluid (which surrounds the brain and spinal cord), synovial fluid (which is present in our joints), pleural fluid (which is found in and around the lungs), pericardial fluid (surrounds the heart), peritoneal fluid (which lines the abdomen walls), amniotic fluid (which surrounds a fetus in the womb), saliva in dental procedures, and any other body fluid that is potentially contaminated with blood, such as vomitus, semen, or vaginal secretions.

Everyone should recognize that exposure to bloodborne pathogens occurs when the blood or other body fluid of an infected person is absorbed into your body, which can occur through direct contact with non-intact skin or with mucous membranes. Unbroken skin is an excellent barrier to infectious agents. However, open wounds, such as cuts, scraps, and broken cuticles, as well as pricking a finger on broken glass or another contaminated sharp object, provide a direct pathway for biological agents to be absorbed through the opening in the skin and into your body. The same is true when infectious fluids contact, and are absorbed through, mucous membranes lining the inside of the mouth, nose, eyelids, and vagina.

Also, be aware that anyone could be carrying a bloodborne virus, even if they do not show signs or symptoms of having a disease. You may recall that these people are "asymptomatic". So do not make a judgement call about a person being infectious based on their lack of symptoms; instead, treat all blood and body fluids as if they are known to contain a virus.

Remember; it only takes a single small exposure to an infected person's blood or other body fluids to contract an infectious virus. So, if you encounter blood or other potentially infectious body fluids while at work, do not touch it. Instead, report it immediately to your supervisor or safety staff so it can be cleaned up and the area disinfected by a designated person who is properly equipped and trained in procedures for dealing with potentially infectious blood and body fluids. The same applies if you should come across an item that could be tainted with blood, such as a used needle

from a syringe or other sharp objects such as contaminated shards of glass.

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Revision #1

Created 27 May 2025 13:22:13 by Blain Schumacher

Updated 27 May 2025 13:24:27 by Blain Schumacher