

WHAT ARE “BLOODBORNE PATHOGENS?”

Workers in many different occupations are at risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV/AIDS. First aid team members, housekeeping personnel, restaurant employees, and nurses are examples of workers who may be at risk of exposure. Bloodborne pathogens are microorganisms that can cause disease when transferred from an infected person to another person through blood or other infected body fluids. In 1991, OSHA issued the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard to protect workers from this risk. The standard applies to both public and private industry.

Non-healthcare workers may become exposed at work by attempting to administer first aid and/or assist an injured co-worker during an accident and coming in contact with that person’s blood or body fluids. Any type of opening in the skin can cause infected blood or fluids to enter your body. The eyes, nose and mouth are also entry ways for diseases. Needle stick injuries are the most common method of exposure for workers. Being punctured by a needle that was discarded into a trash can is becoming more common.

Employers are required to identify tasks and procedures, as well as job classifications where occupational exposure to blood and/or body fluids can occur. After identifying, set a schedule for implementing other provisions of the standard. Universal precautions are methods for protecting yourself and employees from bloodborne pathogens.

Universal precautions assume that all body fluids are infected. Employers are recommended to provide proper Personnel Protective Equipment such as gloves, masks and mouth pieces to protect employees who may be required to handle or may come in contact with bodily fluids. If any employee is stuck by a needle or if they come in contact with blood or other bodily fluids they should:

1. Immediately flood the exposed area with water and clean any wound with soap and water or a skin disinfectant if available
2. Report the injury immediately to a supervisor and/or manager
3. Seek immediate medical attention
4. A medical professional will provide appropriate testing, confidential medical evaluation, prevention treatment and education

The following are ways to prevent this type of exposure:

1. Have a “First Aid” trained team for each shift
2. Make sure your first aid kits have the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment and your employees are trained on how to use them
3. Train your employees never to push down on trash that is in a trash can with their hands
4. To remove trash from a trash can:
 - Always wear gloves
 - On each side of the can, grab the liner and gently pull up
 - Tie the two ends together
 - Pull the bag out and place into a portable tin or heavy gauge plastic container (**Never** hold the bag from the bottom and/or sides)
 - Take the container to the trash bin and empty. Again, **never** grab and/or handle the sides or bottom of the trash bag

Cal/OSHA Publications

A Best Practices Approach for Reducing Bloodborne Pathogens Exposure

http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/BBPBest1.pdf

Don't Risk Your Health

http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/donrisk.html

Exposure Control Plan for Bloodborne Pathogens

http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/expplan2.pdf

Novartis hazard alert for employees and employers in the health care industry

<http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/P08-022V5.pdf>