

BULLETIN – OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY

Blood & Body Fluids

IMPORTANT: *Disposable gloves are required to be in your first aid kits as a barrier device when providing first aid and dealing with blood and bodily fluids.*

The following applies mainly to diseases transmitted through blood but should also be followed when handling other body fluids such as saliva, vomit, urine or feces.

What is a blood borne disease and how is it transmitted?

Blood borne disease (e.g. hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, HIV/AIDS--human immune-deficiency virus) is illness caused by harmful biological organisms that live primarily in blood. Most staff and students are not at high risk of exposure to blood borne pathogens. Blood borne diseases are not transmitted through casual contact, however can develop if infected blood enters the body through cuts, mucus membranes (eyes, nose, mouth) and breaks in the skin.

What is the risk of disease transmission in a school setting?

Staff is at potential risk when there is a possibility of blood contact when cleaning up blood spills, giving first aid or working with children who are known biters. Employees that may be at most risk include custodial staff, first aid personnel, educational assistants, physical education teachers and playground supervisors.

Blood and body fluids visually contaminated with blood present the highest risk for disease transmission. The greatest risk is from a penetrating injury such as a needle stick. Saliva and other body fluids may contain viruses but in low concentrations compared to blood. According to Capital Health “the risk of transmission from biting is far less than the risk from exposure due to a penetrating injury such as a needle stick”. Biting can pose a risk to the person who is bitten as well as the person who bites if there is a break in the skin. The risk is higher if there is visible blood to the wound. Bites, if not properly treated, may result in infection with organisms that can cause serious diseases.

How do I know if a person has a blood borne disease?

You usually don't as carriers do not usually exhibit symptoms. For confidentiality reasons, health professionals cannot disclose the medical status of individuals without their permission. Blood borne diseases are notifiable diseases under the Public Health Act. If a staff member or student becomes infected, physicians and laboratories must report this to regional public health officials. Public health nurses will notify individuals who may have close contact with the infected person and advise of special precautions.

How can the spread of blood borne diseases be prevented in the workplace?

Since we do not usually know whose blood is infected, the safest approach is to treat all blood and body fluids as if it contains germs. *Universal precautions* have been adapted and apply to situations where staff and students have risk of exposure to blood or body fluids.

Universal Precautions include:

- disposable gloves provide a barrier to blood/body fluids; use eye protection if needed
- wash hands when gloves are removed or whenever skin contacts potentially infectious fluids
- use barrier masks when performing artificial respiration
- train staff on proper precautions and clean up procedures
- immunize staff in frequent contact with blood or work with higher-risk populations (e.g. children with biting behaviors)

What is considered an exposure to blood and body fluids (in order of risk)?

- punctures of the skin with blood-contaminated needles, scalpels, or other sharp instruments
- splashes to skin bearing minute scratches, abrasions, burns, or even minor rashes
- splashes to mucous membranes in the mouth, nose, or eyes
- biting or scratching injury where visible blood is present

What should you do if exposed to blood or body fluids at school or work?

1. **For 'Bites' see the specific BRSD Bite Procedure found on Portal and in your sites copy of the BRSD Health and Safety Manual.**
2. **Treat all blood and body fluids as potentially infectious.**
3. Flush exposed area with soap and water for at least 15 minutes allowing the wound to bleed.
4. Immediately seek medical attention if you experience a bite injury where there is blood or a break in the skin, punctures from a needle or epipen, or blood splash.
5. Immediately report incident to your supervisor. Notify the Safety Coordinator as soon as possible, who may refer the employee to a family physician or ER. In the case of hepatitis B, if the blood is known to contain the virus and the exposed person has not been vaccinated or does not have antibodies against hepatitis B, post-exposure immunization may be recommended to reduce the risk of infection.
6. Document the exposure incident on the applicable forms: Incident Report, WCB Reports (if medical treatment is sought). Send a copy to the Safety Coordinator and file a copy at the worksite.

What is the procedure for cleaning up a blood spill?

For small spills

- Wear personal protective equipment if needed (e.g. gloves, eye protection).
- Isolate the spill area to prevent other people from contacting it.
- Gather paper towels and spray bottle of disinfectant solution; solution comprised of 10% bleach (one part bleach to 10 parts water made fresh) or equivalent low level disinfectant.
- Pour disinfectant solution onto spill surface and let stand for 10 minutes. (Note: consult with the custodian if the spill is on a carpet or soft furnishings).
- Blot up solution with paper towels and wipe clean.
- Apply more disinfectant solution and wipe again.
- Place soiled paper towels in plastic bag.
- Remove gloves (folding inside out) and place in plastic bag with soiled towels.
- Close plastic bag and dispose of as general waste.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Many BRSD schools are equipped with mess kits which may be used in this process as well.

What do you do with a used needle or epipen?

See specific bulletin on this subject 'Finding a Needle' on Portal and in your sites copy of the BRSD Health and Safety Manual.