Bloodborne Pathogens in the Workplace
What Are Bloodborne Pathogens?

They are viruses, bacteria, and other microorganisms that:

- Are carried in a person’s bloodstream
- Cause disease

If a person comes in contact with **blood** infected by a bloodborne pathogen, he or she may become infected. Other body fluids may also spread bloodborne pathogens, including:

- Blood products, such as plasma
- Semen and vaginal secretions
- Fluid in the uterus of a pregnant woman
- Fluids surrounding the brain, spine, heart and joints
- Other fluids containing visible blood (such as saliva)

Some bloodborne pathogens can be deadly.

Universal Precautions Can Help You Stay Safe

Following universal precautions means treating everyone’s blood and other body fluids as infectious, **at all times**.

Many workers must follow Universal Precautions by law – the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard established by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

These workers include: **Health Care staff**, Dental Staff, Emergency Medical Responders, Firefighters, Law Enforcement Officers, Lab Workers, employees designated to provide First Aid, Correctional, Laundry, and Funeral Service workers, Barbers, Cosmetologists, Medical Equipment Repair Technicians, and Special Education Teachers.

BUT, anyone can be exposed to bloodborne pathogens if he or she is exposed to blood or other body fluids.
A Closer Look at 3 Bloodborne Pathogens

The HEPATITIS B VIRUS (HBV)

Attacks the liver - HBV can cause:

- Active Hepatitis B - a flu-like illness that can last for months.
- A chronic carrier state - the person may have no symptoms, but can pass HBV to others.
- Cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death

Fortunately, vaccines are available to prevent HBV infection (see page 9).

The HEPATITIS C Virus (HCV)

Also attacks the liver - Symptoms of active infection are milder than those of HBV--- and may not even be present. But, HCV is more likely to cause:

- A chronic carrier state
- Cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death.

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

Causes AIDS - HIV attacks the immune system, making the body less able to fight off infections. In many cases, these infections eventually prove fatal.
People Infected with These Pathogens:

May look and feel healthy - They may not even know they’re infected, but they can still infect others if their blood or other body fluids enter another person through:

- Needle stick injury
- Cuts, scrapes and other breaks in the skin
- Splashes into the mouth, nose, or eyes
- Oral, vaginal, or anal sex
- Sharing needles to inject drugs or for any other reason

Pregnant women who are infected with these pathogens can pass them to their babies. HBV and HIV are more likely than HCV to be spread this way.

Injuries in the Workplace:

Can spread bloodborne pathogens. For example, an injured employee’s blood could contaminate:

- Broken glass
- A tack or nail
- The floor
- A work surface
- Cutting tools
- Other hand tools
- Manufacturing equipment
- Clothing
- Materials used to provide first aid

If you have contact with blood or a contaminated object, you could become infected with a bloodborne pathogen.
Protect Yourself from Bloodborne Pathogens

Use required equipment and labels for your job. These engineering controls may include:

- **Autoclaves** for sterilizing equipment
- **Biological safety cabinets** which protect lab workers from airborne particles
- **Special tools** such as needles designed to help prevent needle stick injuries
- **Special waste containers** for contaminated sharps (needles, broken glass, or any other object that can pierce through other regulated wastes (contaminated first-aid materials))
- **Biohazard labels** which combine the biohazard symbol with the word “Biohazard” (red bags or containers may be used in place of labels)

Follow required work practices for your job:

- **Cover cuts, scrapes, hangnails, rashes etc.**
- **Handle sharp objects carefully**, because gloves will **NOT** keep you from being stuck by a needle. Never bend, break, or recap needles
- **Minimize splashing** of blood and other body fluids
- **Keep food and beverages where they belong** – not in refrigerators, freezers or cabinets used for infectious materials
- **Don’t eat, drink, or smoke in work areas** where bloodborne pathogens may be present. Don’t handle contact lenses or apply cosmetics or lip balm in such areas.
- **Wash your skin immediately after contact** with body fluids or objects that may be contaminated. If soap and running water are not available:
  - Use antiseptic towelettes or hand cleansers
  - Wash with soap and running water as soon as possible
  - Then, report the incident to your supervisor
Use required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Depending on your job, you may be required to:

- **Wear gloves:**
  - If contact with blood, other body fluids or contaminated objects are likely.
  - If you have a cut or scrape, bandage it before putting on gloves.
  - Never reuse disposable latex, nylon or hypoallergenic gloves.
  - Utility gloves of vinyl, leather, etc., may be reused after proper decontamination.

- **Remove gloves:**
  - **So that the glove’s outer surface NEVER touches your skin.**
    - Grasp the glove below the cuff
    - Pull down the glove until it comes off inside out
    - Cup it in the palm of your gloved hand.
    - Insert 2 fingers of your bare hand inside the cuff of the remaining glove.
    - Pull down so this glove also comes off inside out – with the first glove tucked inside.

- **Wash your hands** before putting on and after removing gloves

- **Examine gloves** for tears, cracks and tiny holes before and during use. Replace the damaged gloves as soon as possible
Use other protection and take precautions as needed:

- **Wear a mask and eye protection**, or a full-face shield, if fluids could splash or spray into your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- **Wear a cap, hood and shoe coverings** when exposure to a lot of fluid is likely (such as during surgery, autopsy or embalming).
- **Wear an apron or gown** if fluids could splash or drip onto your clothing. If fluid penetrates the apron or gown, change it as soon as possible.
- **Use a resuscitation device** or resuscitation mask when providing rescue breathing
- **Remove contaminated PPE** and other contaminated clothing carefully and while wearing gloves. Remember to wash hands after removing PPE.
Eliminate Hazards with Proper Housekeeping

- **Don’t touch broken glass.** Pick it up with tongs, or use a broom and dustpan.
- **Properly dispose contaminated sharps** in a covered, puncture-resistant, leak-proof container that is read or labeled with the biohazard symbol.
- **Place other contaminated wastes** (such as gloves or bandages used for first aid) in a leak-proof container or bag that is red or labeled with the biohazard symbol. If the outside of the container or bag becomes contaminated, place it in a second container or bag.
- **Never reach into trash** to retrieve an object. Empty contents onto a newspaper and search with your eyes.
- **Report full sharps and waste containers** and see that they are covered, removed and replaced.
- **Wipe up spilled blood** or other body fluids with disposable towels soaked in an approved disinfectant or solution of bleach and water while wearing utility gloves. If you use a sponge or a mop, soak it afterward in a solution of bleach and water for at least 10 minutes.
- **Replace protective coverings** on work surfaces if they are visibly contaminated with blood or other body fluids.
- **Clean equipment and work surfaces** if visibly contaminated with blood or other body fluids. Use an approved disinfectant. Disinfect reusable waste containers regularly.
Consider the Hepatitis B Vaccine

It’s your best protection against Hepatitis B!

- The vaccine is given in a series of doses, usually 3 shots over 6 months. You must get each dose for the vaccine to work. A booster shot may be needed later.

Ask your Health Care Provider

- If there is any reason you should not have the vaccine (for example, people allergic to yeast should not have it).
- Tell your health care provider if you are pregnant.

Remember: There are no vaccines for HCV or HIV – and no cures. Even if you are vaccinated against HBV, you must STILL follow universal precautions to stay safe on the job.
What If I’m Exposed to Blood or Other Body Fluids?

- **Wash the exposed area immediately** with soap and running water. Scrub vigorously with lots of lather. Try to save the sharp or other contaminated object for testing.

- **Report the incident promptly** according to your workplace policy. Centrex Rehab requires you to report any incident immediately to your supervisor or the weekend manager.

- **Get medical help**, treatment and counseling. If your workplace is covered by OSHA’s Bloodborne Pathogen Standard, ask about getting a confidential medical evaluation, testing, treatment and counseling.

- **Ask your health care provider about:**
  - Immediate drug treatment to help prevent infection from HIV
  - Hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) and the vaccine series, if you haven’t already been vaccinated against HBV
  - Antiviral therapy, if you develop chronic HCV infection
  - Weighing the possible risk and benefits of treatment.

Learn All You Can About Bloodborne Pathogens

- **Read** your facility’s exposure control plan. The plan, available in workplaces covered by OSHA, spells out the steps being taken to keep you safe from bloodborne pathogens.
- **Consult** your supervisor, Medical Director or HR department.
- **Contact** your state or local health department if you need more information.
- **Call** the 24/7 CDC National AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS (2437).

Protect yourself and your co-workers from bloodborne pathogens.  
Take precautions, not chances!