

How To Protect Yourself From Bloodborne Pathogens

*Acknowledgements: Dr. Marelle Yongue, University Staff Physician
Camille Moniotte, Southeastern Louisiana University*

Note: The information in this document is informative, but general. More information can be found in section 12 in the EH&S Policy. Formal Bloodborne Pathogen Training is available to all University employees free of charge and can be scheduled at www.safety.louisiana.edu (click on training).

What are Bloodborne Pathogens?

Bloodborne pathogens are microorganisms such as viruses that are carried in blood and can cause disease in people. Everyone has some exposure to blood borne pathogens. However, employees who come into contact with bodily fluids (custodial workers, plumbers, Student Health Services, University Police, etc) have the most risk of infection.

The Hepatitis B Virus

The Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) causes infection and inflammation of the liver. Medical symptoms that occur from this virus, in extreme cases, can persist for the lifetime of the carrier. The Hepatitis B Virus can be transmitted by sexual contact, blood-to-blood contact, prenatal contact, and contaminated bodily fluids. Methods of infection include intimate contact, body/ear piercing and tattoos with contaminated equipment, and touching infected blood with a skin opening. The HBV is very stable and can survive in dried blood for at least one week. Once exposed, symptoms may not be evident for 45 – 180 days.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is one that attacks the body's immune system, weakening it so that it cannot fight other deadly diseases. HIV is primarily transmitted through blood-to-blood contact, but can also be transmitted through sexual contact. In contrast to HBV, HIV is very fragile and will not survive very long outside the human body. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a fatal disease that is caused by HIV. A person can be infected with HIV for years before AIDS develops. In some cases, HIV can lay dormant in the human body and that person may never develop AIDS.

Universal Precautions

Unbroken skin forms an impervious barrier against blood borne pathogens. However, infected blood can enter your system through things like open sores, cuts, abrasions, mucous membranes, acne, and sunburn. Because bloodborne pathogens are microscopic, treat all objects that come into contact with bodily fluids as if they contain something harmful.

There is an HBV vaccination that involves 3 shots and some blood tests. Ask your doctor for more information on this procedure.

Personal Protection For Everyone

Here are some helpful tips to avoid bloodborne pathogens:

- Keeps cuts and scrapes bandaged until they are fully healed.
- Wash your hands with soap often – especially when leaving the restroom.
- In an emergency, you may have to help someone else who is bleeding. In this case, if gloves are not available, use 2 clean trash bags for emergency protection.
- If blood or other bodily fluids are discovered on campus, contact the Physical Plant immediately so that it can be properly cleaned (phone- 482-6440, 24 hours per day).
- If you accidentally touch someone else's bodily fluids with your bare skin, don't panic. The chances of being infected are remote. Wash yourself with soap and water and contact your doctor immediately.
- If your clothing is contaminated with unknown bodily fluids, throw them away. Most residential clothes washers do not heat the water high enough to destroy bloodborne pathogens.

For more information, try the following resources:

The Center For Disease Control - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/bp.html>

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Bloodborne Pathogen Standard, 29CFR 1910.1030 – <http://www.osha.gov>