



Protecting Yourself from Blood-Borne Pathogens

When helping an injured employee, the first thing you're likely to think about is treatment. Your mind races with thoughts of how quickly you can take care of this person. But don't jump into treatment too fast. You may risk exposing yourself to blood-borne pathogens.

What are blood-borne pathogens?

Blood-borne pathogens are found in human blood and can cause diseases such as hepatitis B and C as well as HIV.

Hepatitis B is a liver disease that is caused by the hepatitis B virus. The disease can be treated by antibiotics, but it can also develop into a chronic condition.

Hepatitis C is also a liver disease, and it's caused by the hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C can be a lifelong infection and, in some cases, it can lead to liver cancer.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) weakens the immune system so that the body can't protect itself from disease. HIV can lead to severe sickness as well as AIDS. There is no cure for HIV or AIDS.

Casual contact such as shaking hands with an infected person will not transmit any of these diseases. Even getting blood on the bottom of your shoe won't do it. To get infected, you must have direct contact with an infected person's blood. For instance, the infected blood can get into your bloodstream through a cut or abrasion on your body if you administer first aid without the proper protective gear.

Because of the serious nature of these diseases, each employee should:

- Become familiar with the contents of their location's first aid kit.
- Know the proper first aid and clean up procedures used when dealing with injuries that could cause potential exposures.

Getting to Know Your First Aid Kit

Each location is provided with a standard first aid kit. Each kit contains basic supplies like band-aids, gauze, and adhesive tape.

To ensure everyone's safety, first aid kits also contain:

- All the necessary personal protective equipment including latex gloves, goggles, and a mask.
- Bio-hazard disposal bags used to safely contain contaminated gloves, gauze, and sponges.
- Undiluted bleach used to clean the accident area.

Be sure you know where your location's first aid kit is located. If you find your location's first aid kit is missing supplies, notify your manager or contact the Risk Department.

Protect Yourself when Providing First Aid

While treating your co-worker may be the first thing on your mind when an injury occurs, **STOP** and protect yourself first before providing first aid.

- If you are the first one to reach your co-worker, observe the scene before approaching to ensure you are not putting yourself in danger.
- Tell the next person who arrives to get the first aid kit (if you don't already have it) and notify your supervisor immediately.

Always use the following guidelines when giving first aid even if you think you may not be exposed to blood or other fluids:

- Always wear the proper personal protective equipment before giving any aid. This includes latex gloves, goggles, and a mask. Wear these items the entire time you are providing aid.
- Clean up all surfaces once you're done providing first aid. Remember that tools, countertops, and clothing can get contaminated as well. First, rinse all items with a 1:10 diluted bleach/water solution. Then, clean these same items with soap and water. Any materials used to clean the tools, countertops, or clothing should be placed in a bio-hazard disposal bag.
- Immediately throw away all contaminated gloves, gauze, sponges, and clean-up materials using the bio-hazard disposal bags contained in each first aid kit. Do not throw these items away in a regular trash bag.
- Once treatment and disposal is complete, immediately wash your hands and any other skin that has been exposed. Use soap and warm running water. If you can't use soap, use an antiseptic hand cleaner along with a clean cloth or paper towel.
- Finally, complete an Incident Report with your manager.

A Manager's Responsibility for Exposure Follow Ups

If there are potential exposures to blood-borne pathogens at your location, the Branch Manager must:

- Determine if and where the exposure occurred.
- Contact the Risk Department to notify them of the exposure and obtain the proper forms for treatment.
- Offer employees who were involved in the exposure a Hepatitis B shot within 24 hours.
- If employees opt not to get a shot, each person must complete a treatment waiver form.
- Keep all Incident Reports and waiver forms on file at the location. Copies must also be sent to the Risk Department.

First Aid Provider Training for Employees

While any employee may be called upon to provide first aid in an emergency situation, Ahern Rentals has a First Aid Provider program which trains a number of employees at each location to be the designated first aid providers.

Employees who are part of this program must receive training in OSHA's blood-borne pathogens standards and treatment guidelines. These employees are given a copy of these guidelines and are offered, at no charge, a post-exposure Hepatitis B shot.

If you're interested in becoming one of your location's first aid providers, talk to your manager or contact the Risk Department.

Injuries that expose you to blood-borne pathogens can happen at anytime. Understanding what blood-borne pathogens are, the supplies available at each Ahern location, and the proper procedures for protecting yourself when providing first aid will help keep you and your co-workers safe.

Revision History

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