



Contact with Blood and Other Body Fluids: Facts for Workers in Ontario

When do you have contact with blood and other body fluids?

There are many ways you can have contact with blood and other body fluids at work. Other body fluids are urine, feces, saliva, semen, vaginal secretions, tears and cerebrospinal fluid. You have contact when you are:

- stabbed with a needle, lancet, scalpel, broken glass or other sharp object that has blood or other body fluids on it
- splashed with another person's blood or other body fluids and your skin has tiny scratches, scrapes or burns, or a minor rash
- splashed with blood or a body fluid in the mucous membranes in your mouth, nose or eyes
- bitten by another person

You can also come in contact with blood and other body fluids outside of work. For prevention information, see the section called 'More information.'

What diseases can you get from contact with blood and other body fluids?

Most needle-stick injuries and cuts in the workplace do not result in any disease. The most common diseases you can get from contact with blood and other body fluids are:

- hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), from the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

It is rare to get any other diseases from blood and body fluids in the workplace. Workers who have contact with HIV infected blood or body fluids may become HIV-positive. AIDS is a syndrome that may develop after infection with HIV.

The more common the disease is in the general population, the higher the risk of getting it. The chance that you will infect someone else also becomes more likely. In the workplace, hepatitis B is the most common blood-borne infection, and hepatitis C is the second most common. Hepatitis B and C and AIDS can lead to serious illness and premature death.

You can avoid contact with blood and other body fluids in your workplace. For prevention information, see the section called 'More information'.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is the most common type of hepatitis in the world. People who have a serious or acute hepatitis B infection can spread the virus. It is spread from blood or other body fluids, for instance by having sex or sharing needles. People who carry the virus, but are not sick from it, can also spread hepatitis B.

Many people infected with the virus get better. They are then protected or immune from it for life. However some people do not eliminate the virus and get chronic hepatitis B infections. This can lead to chronic liver disease, such as cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Hepatitis C

In Canada, most people who have hepatitis C do not know they have the infection. There is no vaccine against it. Most people infected will carry the virus forever. Hepatitis C can lead to chronic hepatitis, causing extreme fatigue, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

AIDS

HIV attacks your immune system. Your immune system protects your body from things that can make you sick. People who have HIV become sicker over time. They are open to getting other infections, AIDS and cancer. It may take more than 10 years for an HIV infection to become AIDS.

AIDS is almost always fatal. No cure or vaccine exists. New treatments are very costly and it is too early to measure their full effect.

Who is at risk of contact with blood and body fluids?

Health care workers are most at risk for contact with blood and other body fluids. They have repeated contact with blood, blood products and body fluids. Health care workers are also more likely to get needle-stick injuries. Most at risk are:

- doctors (especially surgeons and emergency room medical staff)
- nurses (especially ICU staff, surgical staff and renal dialysis staff)
- nurse's aides
- dentists
- dental assistants and
- dental hygienists.

Other workers at risk are:

- correctional service workers, workers in mental health institutions or group homes
- emergency workers such as police, firefighters, ambulance attendants and paramedics
- embalmers, post-mortem attendants
- incinerator attendants and
- housekeepers and laundry workers in health-care and other institutions.

What should you do if you have contact with blood or other body fluids?

Report the incident right away to your supervisor and get first aid or medical care. If your workplace has an occupational health service, tell them what happened. You **must** get treatment for the injury, even if it seems minor. Tell the person treating you what happened. File a claim or an incident report with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). Keep your supervisor updated about your health.

If the source is not known

The doctor may test you for hepatitis B or C and HIV if you do not know where the blood or other fluid came from. You may have many tests over a few months to check for infection. You may be offered hepatitis B vaccine and other treatments.

If the source is known

You may be tested for all the diseases even if you know the person who infected you. You may be offered treatment, a vaccine or a prophylaxis. A prophylaxis is something used to prevent the onset of disease. Your doctor may want to talk with the person whose blood or body fluid you were in contact with. The doctor may test the person to find out if he or she is carrying HIV or hepatitis B or C.

If the source is not infected

You will not need as much treatment and follow-up if the person you had contact with does not have hepatitis B or C or HIV. However, the hepatitis B vaccine is often given to workers who are at risk of contact with blood and body fluids.

If you have been infected, can you still work?

You may be able to stay at your job if you feel well and your doctor thinks you can work. You will need to use special safety measures at work until you know if you have hepatitis B or C or HIV. If you find out that you have one of the diseases, ask your doctor if you can keep working. You may need to go to the hospital or take bed rest at home, depending on how you feel.

For more information about contact with blood and other body fluids in your workplace

- Call the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), 1-800-668-4284 or go to www.ccohs.ca on the internet
- Call the Health Care Health and Safety Association (HCHSA), 1-877-250-7444 or go to www.hchsa.on.ca/
- Look at the website of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, www.osha.gov/

Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) plays a key role in the province's occupational health and safety system. Funded by employers, the WSIB is one of the top 10 disability insurers in North America. In addition to a strong prevention mandate, the WSIB provides insurance for injuries and illnesses incurred in workplaces covered under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act* and supports early and safe return to work for injured workers.

This information is available in several languages by calling our information hotline at 416-344-4999 toll-free 1-800-465-5606 or Telephone Service for the Deaf (TTY): 1-800-387-0050