

Safety Alert

Bloodborne Pathogens

What would you do if a coworker were bleeding?

If a coworker received an injury and was bleeding. And, you rush to help your coworker. Do you know how to protect yourself from bloodborne pathogens? Bloodborne pathogens are microorganisms that are present in human blood and can cause disease to those who come into contact with it. They include, but are not limited to, the hepatitis B virus (HBV), the hepatitis C virus (HCV), and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Exposure to bloodborne pathogens may occur by:

- a needlestick,
- through body fluids,
- mucous membranes, or
- an open cut or wound.

The majority of at-risk workers are in the healthcare field, but exposures can also occur to workers in general industrial and office settings.

Employees who have "occupational exposure," such as nurses, first responders, and possibly janitors, are covered by OSHA's bloodborne pathogens standard, and must receive training. For other employees, it's still a good idea to have a general awareness, so that you don't respond to an injured coworker without any idea of the potential risk involved by coming into contact with that person's blood.

What if you have to handle blood?

This brings us to our initial question: What if your coworker received an injury and was bleeding? If you have people in your facility who are first aid trained, call them immediately, since they know how to handle both first aid treatment and exposure to blood. Do not touch another person's blood. If it is an emergency, use latex gloves (found in most first aid kits), and render first aid if you can to help stop the bleeding. If you have safety glasses, wear them.

After the person is stabilized and getting medical treatment, do not clean up the blood spill. Leave it to those who are trained in cleaning up potentially infectious blood. What you CAN do is keep untrained people from touching the spill or trying to clean it up themselves. Make them aware of the danger, and that the area should be treated as a biohazard.

Hopefully you won't find yourself in this situation. But if you do, at least you will know enough about the potential risk of exposure to someone else's blood to know what NOT to do.

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