

Bloodborne Pathogens

Bloodborne pathogens (BBP) are infectious microorganisms that are present in human blood and can cause disease in humans. These pathogens include, but are not limited to, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B (HBC), and hepatitis C (HCV). BBP can be transmitted when bodily fluids or other potentially infectious materials come in contact with you:

- Mucous membranes (eyes, nose, or mouth)
- Broken skin, such as cuts, abrasions, punctures, burns, lacerations, or rashes



Bloodborne pathogens are a concern to everyone in the workplace as they can cause illness to you or your co-workers if exposed. While you may not think you are at risk, there is always a chance of exposure to bloodborne pathogens when providing first aid, handling or coming in contact with contaminated materials or surfaces (including needle sticks), or cleaning up potentially infectious materials (such as vomit or blood).

Here at Northwestern, there were 125 reported workplace injuries from 2016 to 2019 where there was a potential for bloodborne pathogen exposure from abrasions, burns, lacerations, and punctures.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review potential bloodborne pathogen exposures in your workplace and discuss how they can be avoided.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Universal precautions

To avoid exposure to bloodborne pathogens, prevent direct physical contact with all blood and other bodily fluids and treat them all as if infectious. This is known as taking **universal precautions**. Follow these tips to keep yourself safe:

- ✓ Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as goggles, gloves, and face shields when you are performing tasks that may expose you to bloodborne pathogens, such as cleaning up bodily fluids or handling trash bags that may contain improperly disposed needles.
- ✓ Employ safe work practices to avoid cuts, burns, abrasions, and lacerations in the workplace to reduce the exposure and potential spread of bloodborne pathogens.
- ✓ Good housekeeping, good personal hygiene, and awareness of the potential hazards can go a long way in preventing exposure to bloodborne pathogens.
- ✓ Administer first aid only if you have been trained to do so and always wear appropriate PPE, as this puts you at risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens.

Working in laboratory spaces



When you need to perform work in laboratory spaces, be sure to contact the appropriate individual, such as the researcher, for authorization to enter and perform work. You should ask what potential hazards are in the space and what PPE is required. Lab spaces with potential biohazards, which include bloodborne pathogens, will be marked with signage warning of the hazards (pictured left).

Report all actual or potential bloodborne pathogen exposures and injuries on the Risk Management [website](#) or call 847.491.5582.

Learn more: Complete Bloodborne Pathogens training at learn.northwestern.edu and visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [website](#) for more information.

Safety at Home

Below are tips to prevent exposure to bloodborne pathogens, germs, and viruses to help keep you and your loved ones healthy:

- February is an active month for influenza (flu); to avoid the spread of germs, ensure you and your family frequently wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Keep surfaces at home clean to avoid spreading viruses and bacteria.
- Avoid close contact with sick people and avoid close contact with others when you are sick; cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936.

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management at gwen.butler@northwestern.edu for details.