

# Bloodborne and Airborne Pathogens

## Universal precautions

Universal precautions are safety guidelines in which all blood and other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) are handled as if they were contaminated. This includes:

- Blood, Saliva that may contain blood, Cerebrospinal, Cerebrospinal Semen, Vaginal secretions, fluid, Synovial fluid, Pleural fluid, Any body fluid where blood is visible, and Any body fluid that cannot be identified.

## Emergency procedures for an unexpected exposure incident

If you are exposed, take the following actions:

- If blood or OPIM splashes in your eyes or other mucous membranes, flush the area with running water for 20 minutes if possible.
  - Wash any exposed area well, using soap and water.
- Treat any scabs and sores gently when cleaning your skin.
  - Report the exposure to your supervisor as soon as possible.
- Save any potentially contaminated object for testing purposes.
- Seek medical care as soon as possible.

Employers are required to confidentially inform you on how to make an incident report in case you are exposed. After receiving your report, an employer must do the following:

- Identify and document the person or other source of the blood or OPIM
- Obtain consent to test the source person's blood and arrange for the testing of that person (unless he or she is already known to have an infection)
- Inform you of the test results and maintain confidentiality
- Arrange medical care as needed.

The treatment and follow-up medical care depend on the type of exposure: the substance involved, the route of transmission and the severity of the exposure.

## OSHA requirements for reporting exposure incidents

- Date and time of exposure
- Your job title/classification

- Your work location where the exposure occurred
- Activity you were performing at the time of the exposure
- Your training for that activity
- Preventive work practice controls used at the time of the exposure
- PPE used at the time of the exposure.

## What are airborne pathogens?

There are 3 types of airborne pathogens: viral, bacterial, and fungal. Some examples of these pathogens transmitted through the air include COVID-19, tuberculosis, measles and chickenpox. An infectious person's cough or sneeze can send tiny droplets of moisture into the air that contain the pathogen. These contaminants can remain airborne for several hours. Exposure does not always result in infection. The likelihood of transmission depends on the following: How contagious the infection is, where the exposure occurs, how long the exposure lasts, how healthy you are at the time of the exposure.

According to the CDC, employees in certain workplaces also face a greater risk of exposure. These workplaces include:

- Commercial airlines
- Correctional facilities
- Drug and treatment centers
- Health care facilities
- Homeless shelters
- Long-term care facilities

If you are in contact with someone you know or suspect might have an airborne infection, take these precautions:

- Use PPE, including masks, gloves, and gown
- Wash hands with soap and water frequently or use hand sanitizer
  - Use disposable or dedicated equipment and be sure to clean and disinfect regularly
- Limit transportation of the person as much as possible and keep them in a room with no other people or patients
- Prioritize cleaning and disinfection of rooms and frequently touched surfaces or equipment