It’s in the Blood

Protect yourself from BBPs

Human blood and other bodily fluids can contain bloodborne pathogens (BBPs) that cause serious diseases, such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, and the hepatitis B and C viruses that can lead to chronic liver disease. OSHA requires employers to identify job classifications with occupational exposure to blood and bodily fluids as part of their regular duties. Some workers, especially in the healthcare field, may have occupational exposure on a daily basis. Others, such as laundry workers, police and firefighters, lab technicians, and mortuary workers, may have less-frequent exposure. But all workers need to know how to protect themselves by following “universal precautions” and treating all blood and bodily fluids as though they are infected.

Follow these precautions to protect yourself from exposure to BBPs:

• Wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), which includes gloves, eye protection, surgical masks, protective lab coats, surgical caps, or other clothing.

• Don’t suction or use a pipette to draw blood or other potentially infectious materials by mouth.

• Minimize spraying, splashing, spattering, and droplet generation in all procedures involving blood or other potentially infectious materials.

• Don’t eat, drink, smoke, apply cosmetics or lip balm, or handle contact lenses in work areas with possible BBP exposure.

• Don’t keep food or drinks where blood or other potentially infectious materials are present.

• Use a disinfectant solution as soon as possible to clean and decontaminate any area where fluids have spilled.

Follow safety rules to protect yourself from sharps injuries.

• Use needleless devices, if possible, and never reuse or recap needles.

• Always use puncture-resistant, leakproof containers for disposal of needles and other sharps.

Finally, WASH YOUR HANDS frequently and thoroughly. Wash with soap and warm running water or use antiseptic alcohol-based hand cleaners, especially after contact with potentially infectious materials. Frequent hand washing is also essential to prevent the spread of other infections—so make it a habit that you follow every day.
The Runaway Forklift

On the case

A forklift operator drove a forklift up a ramp from an outside area into the warehouse. The operator started to turn into the warehouse when he noticed that a co-worker needed some help. So he stopped the forklift and dismounted without shutting off the lift truck or setting the parking brake. As he dismounted, he accidentally hit the gearshift and shifted the forklift into reverse. After taking several steps away from the forklift, the operator noticed that the vehicle was driving backward by itself. He ran back to the truck with the intention of climbing in and stopping it. But just as he jumped onto the left side of the forklift, the left rear tire rolled off the edge of the loading dock. The forklift tipped over to the left, preventing the forklift driver from climbing inside. He was hanging outside the forklift when it fell from the loading dock to the ground, landing on him and crushing and killing him.

To prevent accidents like this one, take these precautions:

1. Find a level surface to park on. If no level surface is available, put a chock under the forklift’s tires to prevent it from rolling if the parking brake fails.
2. Lower forks to the ground. Never leave forks up in the air.
3. Put the gear in neutral.
4. Make sure the wheels are straight.
5. Set the parking brake. Test the parking brake in your preshift inspection.
6. Turn off the engine before dismounting. Remove the key.

BBP Quiz

Test your knowledge

Circle T for True or F for False.

1. Human blood and other bodily fluids can contain bloodborne pathogens (BBPs) that cause serious diseases. **T** 
2. The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the hepatitis B and C viruses (HBV and HCV) are BBPs. **T** 
3. HIV can lead to chronic liver disease. **F**
4. Only healthcare workers need to know how to protect themselves from BBPs. **T** 
5. “Universal precautions” means treating all blood and bodily fluids as though they are infected. **T**
6. PPE usually begins with gloves and might include eye protection, surgical masks, and protective lab coats, surgical caps, or other clothing. **T**

ANSWERS

- 1. **T**
- 2. **T**
- 3. **F**
- 4. **T**
- 5. **T**
- 6. **T**

Less-recognized exposure, but all workers need to know how to protect themselves.

1. **T** 2. **T** 3. **F** The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) causes AIDS. **F**