

Contact with Blood or Body Fluids: What You Need to Know

What is the concern with accidental or unplanned contact with blood or body fluids?

Blood and body fluids, such as saliva, semen and vaginal fluid, can contain viruses that may be passed on from an infected person to other people. You cannot tell that a person has one of these infections just by looking at them. If you do come into contact with another person's blood or body fluids, there is a risk that you could get HIV, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C. Other body fluids like sweat, tears, urine, or vomit can pass on viruses when there is blood that can be seen in the fluid.

What should you do if you have contact with someone's blood or body fluids?

If you have contact with blood or body fluids in any of the ways described below, you may need to be given medication to protect against infection. The medication needs to be given to you as soon as possible after the contact, and therefore it is important that you go to the nearest hospital emergency department right away.

- **If you prick yourself by accident with a used needle** – hold the affected limb down low to get it to bleed. Do not squeeze or soak it in bleach. Go to the nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible.
- **If you are splashed on the skin** – wash well with soap and water. Go to the nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible.
- **If you are splashed in the eyes, mouth or nose** – rinse well with water. Go to the nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible.
- **In the case of bites** – when it is not known if the person bitten or who bit has an infection, and there is blood in the mouth of the person

who bit or in the wound of the person bitten – both people should go to the nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible.

- **If you are sexually assaulted** – go to the nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible.

What happens in the emergency department?

You will be asked to give informed consent for your blood to be tested for hepatitis B and C, and HIV. Then your treatment will be based on the type of exposure to blood or body fluids, your blood test results, and if the doctor is able to determine whether the person's blood you were exposed to is infectious for hepatitis B or C, or HIV.

If there is a possible exposure to HIV, the emergency department doctor will start you on a five-day starter course of anti-virus medications. **These medications should be started within two hours or as soon as possible after exposure.** Because of this, it is important to go to the nearest hospital emergency department immediately after any accidental exposure to blood or body fluids.

You will need to see your doctor to find out if you need to continue to take these medications for a full month. These medications are not provided free for sexual activity that was planned or agreed to by both people, or for shared needle use. You may also be given a hepatitis B vaccine shot and a hepatitis B immune globulin shot to help protect you from hepatitis B disease.

There is currently no treatment to prevent infection with hepatitis C as the result of contact with infected blood or body fluid. Blood testing will show if you become infected with hepatitis C. If you become infected, you will be considered for treatment to get rid of the virus.

If you have not had a tetanus shot in the last five to ten years, and depending on how deep the scratch, puncture, bite or wound, you may also get a booster for tetanus.

To find out if you have become infected from contact with blood or body fluids, you will need to have follow up blood tests during the year after the contact. Blood tests would be done at 6 weeks and at 3, 6 and 12 months after the contact.

What is the risk of getting HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C?

The risk of getting HIV, hepatitis B or C after contact with infected blood or body fluids depends on the type of virus, the amount of virus in the blood or body fluid at the time, and the kind of contact. For example, piercing through the skin poses a greater risk than splashing on the skin.

The risk of getting infected after exposure to HIV-infected blood or body fluids is about 0.1 to 0.3 per cent. This means that 1 to 3 people will get infected out of 1000 exposures to blood or body fluids.

The risk of getting infected with hepatitis B virus is about 5 to 30 per cent, depending on how infectious the person is who was the source of the infected blood or body fluid. The risk of getting infected with hepatitis C is between 3 to 10 per cent. The emergency department doctor will tell you whether your exposure has put you at risk of these infections.

How can the spread of infection be prevented?

It is not possible to know if you have become infected or not after an exposure for at least six months. If you do get infected, you can spread the infection to others. While you are waiting for the results of the six-month follow-up testing, follow these steps to prevent the possible spread of infection to others:

- Do not have sex (vaginal, oral or rectal) or if you do have sex, use a latex condom with a water-based lubricant every time.
- Do not donate blood, plasma, organs, breast milk, tissue or sperm.

- Do not share toothbrushes, dental floss, razors, or other things that may have blood or body fluids on them.
- Cover open cuts and scratches until they are healed.
- Carefully throw away anything with blood on it – for example, tampons, pads, Kleenex, dental floss and bandages. Put sharp items such as razors or needles that might have blood on them into a hard-sided container, taped shut. Put the container in the regular garbage – do not place in a recycling box.
- Do not share needles, drug snorting equipment, etc.
- Try not to become pregnant; but if you do, see your doctor, or call the Oak Tree Clinic at BC Women's Hospital at 604-875-2212 or toll free in BC at 1-888-711-3030.
- For complete instructions on cleaning up blood spills, follow the instructions in BC HealthFile [#29 Steps for Protection against Germs and Disease](#).

For more information, see the following BC HealthFiles:

[#25a Hepatitis B Vaccine](#)

[#33 Hepatitis A Vaccine](#)



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