

Bloodborne pathogens

Key takeaways:

- Blood and bodily fluids (known as other potentially infectious material) **may carry microscopic viruses** and illnesses. Some viruses can live outside of a host for up to one week.
- Universal precautions take **measures to protect employees as if all bodily fluids are contaminated.**
- Employees who are anticipated to clean up potentially contaminated material should **be trained on PPE use, disposal procedures, chemical use for decontamination, and measures** to take should an exposure occur.

Bloodborne pathogens (BBP) are microscopic organisms which can cause disease or illness to humans. These diseases can include viruses such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B (HBV), and hepatitis C (HCV). Viruses like HCV can stay live outside of a host for up to one week. Professionals within emergency response, housekeeping, healthcare, and many other industries are likely to work around bloodborne pathogens. Bloodborne pathogens may be found in blood, feces, other bodily fluids (typically referred to as other potentially infectious material or OPIM), and on surfaces that may have contacted OPIM.

Employers should complete an [exposure control plan](#) to identify which employees might work around bloodborne pathogens. The plan should further outline:

- How to train employees
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and gear for clean-up
- Vaccinations
- Measures that should be taken should an exposure occur

If employees are to clean bodily fluids or routes of exposures, such as needles, training should be provided on universal precautions. (Oregon OSHA's guide on [Bloodborne Pathogens](#) is a helpful resource with easy-to-understand examples.) Universal precautions is an approach to cleaning and controlling infections. In this approach, employees are given PPE as if the fluids or articles they are handling are known to be contaminated. Training on universal precautions gets employees in the mindset to take all measures to protect themselves regardless of the scenario. This may include donning/doffing PPE gloves, aprons, goggles, or face shields. In addition to PPE, workers should be trained on the proper use of chemicals to kill the above listed viruses. Standard household cleaners often do not.



Take action (Complete one or more activities as a team)

- GROUP DISCUSSION: What tasks or duties within your organization have potential exposure to bloodborne pathogens? What is the frequency of this potential exposure? Who is BBP trained?
- FIELD TRIP: Where do trained personnel find BBP clean up kits? Are PPE items stored separately and if so, where? Go locate them.
- DRILL: If you are on a team identified to handle BBP, use ketchup or another benign substance to stage a cleanup incident. Walk through the steps collectively identifying PPE needs, cleanup procedures, decontamination steps, and debrief on areas of improvement.

