



City Safe

January/
February
2004

Number 14

A Guide To Assist In Training
Employees About:

Bloodborne Pathogens

Inside this issue. . .

General Hazards/Identifying Hazards	Page 2
Protection against Bloodborne Pathogens	Page 3
Sharps Safety Procedures	Page 4
Emergency Response Precautions	Page 5
Quick Tip on Using Life Jackets	Page 6

*Kansas Municipal Insurance Trust
Board of Trustees & Key Contacts*

Carol Eddington - President
Oswego

Rhonda Schuetz - Vice President
Hiawatha

Keith DeHaven - Treasurer
Sedgwick

Gary Hobbie -
Immediate Past President
Russell

David Alfaro Nancy Calkins
Augusta Mission

Linda Jones Cheryl Lanoue
Osage City Concordia

Howard Partington Ron Pickman
Great Bend Goodland

Bill Powers
Ulysses

Don Moler
LKM Executive Director
Ex-Officio

Don Osenbaugh
Pool Administrator

Bret Glendening Wendy Flowers
KMIT Agent Admin. Assistant
Co-Editor Co-Editor

Denise Humphrey
Bookkeeper

City Safe is a publication of the League of Kansas Municipalities and the Kansas Municipal Insurance Trust for the purpose of educating and informing cities about loss control methods and risk management. Contents herein are not intended to provide specific legal or medical advice. Readers should seek advice on specific concerns from a qualified professional.

*Kansas Municipal Insurance Trust
300 SW 8th Avenue
Topeka, KS 66603
Phone: (785) 354-9565
Fax: (785) 354-4186
wflowers@lkm.org*

Everyone should be aware of the risk posed by bloodborne pathogens. Utilizing the information in this issue, and taking the necessary precautions, will help protect you if you have to respond to an emergency, or if you are cleaning up biohazardous waste.

General Hazards -

Bloodborne pathogens are microorganisms in blood or other body fluids that can cause disease in people. The following are of particular concern:

- The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS. As you know, AIDS is usually a fatal illness. However, people can carry HIV for years without any symptoms, often not aware that they have it.
- The big problem with AIDS is that it attacks the human immune system. Once people actually develop AIDS, their immune systems cannot fight off the disease. When people die with AIDS, their death is usually from a disease their bodies could not recover from, such as pneumonia or certain types of cancer.

Of further concern is another bloodborne pathogen that is much more common than AIDS -- the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Hepatitis B affects the liver, and is fatal in a small number of cases. People who carry HBV can pass it on to others. Once you acquire HBV, you are at much greater risk for potentially fatal liver ailments, such as cirrhosis and primary liver cancer.

The chances that you will come in contact with these viruses on the job are slim. Even people whose jobs cause them to come into regular contact with blood or other body fluids rarely become infected. But because HIV and HBV are so serious, employers and employees agree that it is important for affected workers to make every effort to prevent risking exposure to human blood and other body fluids.

Identifying Hazards -

Bloodborne pathogens can be transmitted through human blood and various other body fluids. But let's look first at how HIV and HBV are not transmitted.

You cannot tell by looking at a person if that person carries HIV or HBV.

Often, they do not know it themselves. But that does not mean you should worry that everyone you see is a potential carrier. You cannot contract either virus through casual contact. In other words, HIV and HBV are not transmitted by:

- Touching an infected person.
- Coughing or sneezing.
- Using the same equipment, materials, toilets, water fountains, or showers as an infected person.

Now let's look at how the viruses are transmitted. The most common means are:

- Sexual contact.
- Shared drug needles.
- Being stuck by an infected needle or other sharp instrument.
- Direct contact between broken or chaffed skin and infected body fluids.



In addition, Hepatitis B can be transmitted through contact with caked dried blood and surfaces that have been contaminated.

Employee training is, of course, an important part of the process. As with all safety issues, this is designed to prevent or limit exposure to hazards. Employers should provide training that gives employees the knowledge to understand the risks and to protect themselves. Employers should also provide employees with personal protective clothing and equipment that will help them work safely.

Utilize biohazard warning labels and signs on containers, including waste containers, that could hold contaminated materials.

All employees who could reasonably expect to come into contact with human blood or other potentially infectious materials in the course of doing their jobs should review this information. Obviously most at-risk employees are those with a medical or health function such as: emergency responders, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, fire and rescue and law enforcement personnel. In the course of performing their jobs, they could be exposed to open wounds and to contaminated emergency medical items like needles or bandages. These employees often work in dangerous, unpredictable, and uncontrollable situations, so it is particularly important for them to understand the risks, and to be prepared and equipped to take proper precautions.

Protection Against Bloodborne Pathogens -

There is one central approach that health care workers and others at risk are told to follow to avoid exposure to bloodborne pathogens. It is called universal precautions.

“Universal precautions” is a very simple concept. It means that workers are to treat all blood and other potentially infectious body fluids as if they are infected. It is the same kind of precaution you follow with any possibly hazardous substance. The point of universal precautions is to avoid direct contact with blood and

body fluids. And that is good advice whether you work in health care, happen to help an injured person, or are simply visiting someone in the hospital.

There are a number of common sense protections people take as part of following universal precautions. Some of them will sound familiar, because they are much like the ways we protect ourselves from dangerous exposure to any hazardous substance.

Employers should provide employees with protective clothing. Protective clothing, as you know, acts as a barrier between employees and direct contact with hazardous materials in this case, bloodborne pathogens.

Gloves are the most common form of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to prevent this type of exposure; you have probably noticed them being worn at your doctor's or dentist's office. Depending on their jobs, employees may also be provided with masks and goggles, or glasses with solid side shields. Other PPE may include gowns, aprons, or other clothing, surgical caps or hoods, and even shoe covers.

These PPE requirements make sense for anyone who wants to avoid contact with blood and possible exposure to infection. If you want to help a bleeding person, wear disposable gloves if at all possible. If gloves are not available, use a handkerchief, towel, or other protection to avoid direct contact with blood.

If there is an accident that involves large quantities of blood, protective clothing and eyewear are also recommended.

It is also a good idea to treat PPE that is worn to prevent contact with blood the same way you would any protective gear. In other words:

- Check to make sure its in good condition before putting it on.
- Remove it carefully to avoid contaminating yourself or anything around you.
- Dispose of it in proper containers. Towels, sheets, and other possibly infected linens also have to be placed in proper containers for disposal.
- Do not mix contaminated clothing or linens with other laundry.

Another familiar part of universal precautions is the instruction to wash any exposed skin with soap and water immediately after exposure to infectious materials. Thorough washing is also required, as soon as gloves or other personal protective equipment is removed.

In addition, if the eyes, nose, or mouth have come in contact with blood, employees are instructed to immediately flush the exposed parts with water.

Other hygiene instructions are also much like those we follow with hazardous substances. For example:

- Don't keep food or drink in work areas with exposure potential.
- Don't eat, drink, smoke, apply makeup or lip balm, or handle contact lenses in areas with exposure potential.
- Take care to minimize splashing or spattering of potentially infectious materials.
- Don't suction potentially infectious materials by mouth.

- Cover open cuts, rashes, and other broken skin.
- Don't touch anything that is contaminated, such as a bloody surface or clothing.

Sharps Safety Procedures -

Workers must take a number of different precautions to avoid getting stuck by a needle or anything sharp that might be contaminated. For instance:

- Dispose of sharps immediately after use.
- Never reach by hand into a container holding sharps; use tongs or other equipment.
- Keep containers for disposable sharps upright.
- Place a used sharp carefully into the disposal container so it does not stick out.
- Never clean up broken glass by hand; use tongs, a brush and pan, etc.



Housekeeping is another area where it is important to follow safety procedures to prevent exposure to bloodborne pathogens. Again, you will probably find that the procedures sound familiar. For instance:

- Clean up all spills immediately.
- Clean and decontaminate all equipment and surfaces after contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials.
- Clean and decontaminate pails and other reusable containers regularly - immediately if they have contacted potentially infectious materials.

Emergency Response Precautions -

The following recommendations are made for people other than health care workers who might come in contact with blood.

Emergency responders, for example, are told to make sure their vehicles contain equipment that will help them to stay safe. Among the materials they should carry:

- Pocket mouth-to-mouth resuscitation masks and mechanical respiratory assistance devices.
- Disposable airway equipment or resuscitation bags.
- A change of work clothes.
- Several changes of gloves.
- PPE such as masks, safety glasses, etc.
- Decontamination equipment and solutions.

Police and other public safety officers, who handle assaults or conduct body searches, are urged to wear gloves whenever possible. To avoid contact with needles or other sharps, they are supposed to use flashlights

and longhandled mirrors for searches. Where possible, it is suggested that they have suspects empty their own pockets or purses.

As you can see, it is not always easy for employees to avoid exposure to blood or other fluids that could be infected. That's why this information is so important. Obviously, anyone who is exposed to blood or other body fluids on the job should report it promptly so they can get proper medical attention on the off chance that they have actually been exposed to something dangerous.

USE LIFE JACKETS . . .

. . . every time. If your city employees **EVER** perform any task which requires being on a boat, for any reason, for **ANY** length of time, your city should have a **WRITTEN POLICY** which **REQUIRES** the WEARING (not just having close by) of life jackets, by everyone on the boat. Being on the water is always more dangerous than people realize, and the danger is enhanced significantly when the water is cold and/or when the wind is blowing. Remember, those "warm" winter days are probably the most dangerous of all (after all, the **WATER** isn't warm, is it?). And, last but not least, **STATE** and **FEDERAL** laws **REQUIRE** the use of life jackets/vests ("personal flotation devices"). Drowning is not nearly as rare as most people think!



Kansas Municipal Insurance Trust

300 SW 8th Avenue
Topeka, KS 66603