

Hepatitis Hazard

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Hepatitis is a potentially fatal illness that can affect workers in any industry, but particularly in healthcare, custodial work, law enforcement, social work and jobs involving international travel.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Bloodborne pathogens including some types of hepatitis are serious health hazards. Bloodborne pathogens are bacteria or viruses found in bodily fluids of affected individuals. Some cause serious or even fatal diseases.

The most widely-known bloodborne pathogen is the virus that causes AIDS, known as HIV. But the three main strains of hepatitis virus pose great danger to many people. Hepatitis is a group of six viruses causing liver disease with effects ranging from mild illness to death. The three main types are A, B and C. There are vaccines against A and B, but not against C, and there's *no cure for any type of hepatitis*.

EXAMPLES

- Hepatitis A is caught from contaminated food and water.
- Hepatitis B is the most common strain. Transmission requires contact with infected bodily fluids, such as workplace exposures.
- Hepatitis C is common among intravenous drug users. About 30 percent of infected people don't know they have it. Nonetheless, about 90 percent of Hepatitis C sufferers experience health effects for life.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

If you are travelling, ask your doctor about

getting vaccinated against Hepatitis A. Take precautions to avoid consuming contaminated food and drink. Safer sex and clean-needle precautions help reduce the risk of Hepatitis B and C.

If your job puts you at risk of hepatitis infection:

- Get vaccinated.
- Always treat bodily fluids as infectious.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly.
- Disinfect surfaces immediately if contamination is suspected.

Wear PPE

Latex gloves provide protection against bloodborne pathogens. If you have a cut or sore on your hands, wear two pairs; that way if one rips you're still protected. Anyone allergic to latex should use nitrile gloves or other material.

To protect your eyes and mucous membranes from splashes, sprays or spills, wear a face shield and goggles. To protect your body, consider wearing a lab coat, an impermeable apron or the draped covering called a "wedding gown."

Be sharp with needles

Finally, use care when dealing with needles, blades and sharp objects. Never re-use a needle and always dispose of used needles and sharps in a proper receptacle.

FINAL WORD

Make sure to immediately report any injury (such as needlesticks) or exposure to bodily fluids so that you can get medical attention fast. Prompt treatment may prevent hepatitis infection.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Hepatitis causes severe, but temporary health effects.
 True False
2. Hepatitis can be cured.
 True False
3. You can be vaccinated for hepatitis types A and B only.
 True False
4. Hepatitis A is transmitted by contaminated food.
 True False
5. You can get types B and C from infected bodily fluids or needles.
 True False

What Would You Do?

You're emptying a garbage can and you feel a painful jab in your finger. There's a small metal object sticking out of the bag. What should you do now? And how could you have prevented this puncture?

T1703-03

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Safety Talks!

FOR THE LEADER

Infection Control ■ T1703-03

BEFORE THE TALK 7 PREPARATION TIPS

- 1** This safety talk has information for workers in a variety of situations. For healthcare employees, there is specific advice about protection against needlesticks and the use of personal protective equipment.
- 2** If your workplace is a food service setting, you can use this safety meeting as an opportunity to review food safety procedures to prevent the spread of hepatitis and other infectious diseases.
- 3** For the general work population, a general understanding of hepatitis can help prevent the spread of hepatitis both at work and in personal life.
- 4** Visit this site for more information on the three main types of hepatitis: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/hep/index_e.html
- 5** Bring examples of personal protective equipment (PPE). Have employees demonstrate how to correctly use it.
- 6** Ask the audience for questions and comments—remind the people that there are no “silly questions,” and that what they don’t know can kill them.
- 7** Invite a public health representative to talk about hepatitis.

■ For information on a variety of safety topics, check out Bongarde’s online network for safety professionals at <http://www.SafetyXChange.org>

■ If you want the latest in job safety news, tips, photos, health-related articles, fatality reports and audio talks, sign up for Safety Smart! Weekly Briefing at <http://www.SafetySmart.com>.

AFTER THE TALK CHECKLIST

- Provided extra training to workers who did poorly on quiz
Date: _____
- Observed workers
Date: _____
- Refresher training
Date: _____
- Other (describe)

Date: _____

DATE: _____

LOCATION: _____

MEETING CONDUCTED BY: _____

MEETING WAS ATTENDED BY: Each participant is to sign below, for record kept on file.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
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Answers to T1703-03 Quiz:

1. False 2. False 3. True 4. True 5. True