

# Body Fluid Exposure Information

People may come into contact with blood and other body fluids under various circumstances. In some cases, body fluids may contain germs (*bacteria* or *viruses*) that cause infections. These germs can be spread when an infected person's body fluids come into contact with the mouth, nose, eyes, genitals, or broken skin of another person. Broken skin includes chapped skin, and skin that has been opened by cuts, abrasions, or irritation and swelling (*dermatitis*).

You are more likely to be exposed to infected body fluids if:

- You are a health care worker or family member who is taking care of a sick person.
- You use needles to inject drugs, and you share needles with other users.
- You have sex or engage in other sexual activities without using a condom or other protection.

The risk of an infection spreading through exposure to body fluids is small and depends on several factors. These include:

- The type of body fluid.
- How you were exposed to it.
- The type of infection.
- The risk factors of the person who is the source of the body fluid. Your health care provider can help you assess the risk.

Prevention is the first defense against body fluid exposure.

## What types of body fluids can spread infection?

The following body fluids can spread infections:

- Blood.
- Semen.
- Vaginal secretions.
- Urine.
- Feces.
- Saliva.
- Nasal or eye discharge.
- Breast milk.
- Amniotic fluid.
- Fluids surrounding body organs.
- Pus or other fluids coming from a wound.

## What are some first-aid measures for body fluid exposure?

The following steps should be taken as soon as possible after you are exposed to body fluids:

### Intact skin

- For contact with closed skin, wash the area with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer.

## Broken skin

- For contact with broken skin:
  - Let the area bleed a little.
  - Wash well with soap and water. If soap is not available, use just water or hand sanitizer.
  - Place a bandage or clean towel on the wound and apply gentle pressure to stop the bleeding.  
**Do not** squeeze or rub the area.

**Do not** use harsh chemicals such as bleach or iodine.

## Eyes

- Rinse your eyes with water or saline for 30 seconds or longer.
- If you are wearing contact lenses, leave the contact lenses in while rinsing your eyes. After the rinsing is complete, remove the contact lenses.

## Mouth

- Spit out the fluids. Rinse with water 4–5 times, spitting it out each time.

## Clothes

- Remove any clothing that comes into contact with body fluids.
- If contact with body fluids came as a result of sexual assault:
  - Seek medical care immediately.
  - **Do not** change clothes until police collect evidence of sexual assault from your clothes.
  - **Do not** shower or take a bath until police collect evidence of sexual assault from your body.

## When should I seek help?

After performing proper first-aid steps:

- Call your health care provider or seek emergency care right away if blood or other body fluids made contact with broken skin or the eyes, nose, mouth, or genitals.
- Tell your work supervisor immediately if the exposure to body fluid happened in the workplace. Follow your company's procedures for dealing with body fluid exposure.

## What will happen after I report the exposure?

Your health care provider will ask you several questions, including questions about:

- Your medical history, including vaccine records.
- Date and time of the exposure.
- Whether you saw body fluids during the exposure.
- Type of body fluid you were exposed to.
- Volume of body fluid you were exposed to.
- How the exposure happened.
- Any devices used, such as needles.
- The area of your body that made contact with the body fluid.
- Any injury to your skin or other areas.
- How long contact was made with the body fluid.
- Whether the person whose body fluid you were exposed to has certain risk factors or health conditions, if known.

Your health care provider will assess your risk for infection. Often, no treatment is necessary. However, in some cases:

- Your health care provider may recommend doing blood tests right away.
- Follow-up blood tests may also be done at certain intervals during the upcoming weeks and months to check for any changes.
- You may be offered treatment to prevent infection after exposure (*post-exposure prophylaxis*). This may include certain vaccines or medicines. This is necessary when there is a risk of a serious infection, such as HIV (*human immunodeficiency virus*) or hepatitis B. Your health care provider will discuss the right treatment and vaccines with you.

## How can I prevent exposure and infection?

### To prevent exposure to body fluids

- Wash and disinfect countertops and other surfaces regularly.
- Wear appropriate protective gear, such as gloves, gowns, masks, or eyewear when the risk of exposure is present.
- Wipe away spills of body fluid with disposable towels and clean the area with a disinfectant.
- Properly dispose of blood products and other fluids. Use secured bags.
- Properly dispose of needles and other instruments with sharp points or edges (*sharps*). Use closed containers that are marked for sharps.
- Avoid injection drug use.
- **Do not** share needles.
- Avoid recapping needles.
- Use a condom during sexual intercourse.
- Use small plastic sheets (*dental dams*) to cover your mouth, vagina, or anus to reduce risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections during oral sex.
- Learn and follow any guidelines for preventing exposure (*universal precautions*) provided at your workplace.



### To reduce your chances of getting an infection

- Make sure your vaccines are up-to-date, including vaccines for tetanus and hepatitis.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. If water and soap are not available, use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid having multiple sexual partners.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider. This is important. You will need to be monitored after you are evaluated for exposure to body fluids.
- Consider pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV if:
  - You are in an ongoing relationship with an HIV-positive partner.
  - You have multiple sexual partners and engage in unprotected sex.
  - You have sex with high-risk partners.
- Consider post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV with medicines (*antiretrovirals*) after unprotected sex. To be most effective, this must be started within 72 hours of a possible exposure.



## To avoid spreading infection to others

- **Do not** have sex or engage in sexual activities until you know you are free of infection.
- **Do not** donate blood, plasma, breast milk, sperm, or other body fluids.
- **Do not** share hygiene items such as toothbrushes, razors, or dental floss.
- Keep open wounds covered.
- Dispose of any items with blood on them (razors, tampons, bandages) by putting them in the trash.
- **Do not** share drug supplies with others. These include needles, syringes, straws, and pipes.
- Follow all instructions from your health care provider for preventing the spread of infection.

## Summary

- Contact with blood and other body fluids can occur under various circumstances. This can cause problems if the fluid contains germs that may cause an infection.
- Treatment depends on the type of body fluid you were exposed to and what part of your body was exposed.
- Preventing exposure to body fluids includes using protection during sex, not sharing needles, keeping countertops and other surfaces clean and clear of body fluids, and wearing protective gear (gloves, gowns, masks) when risk of exposure is present.
- Make sure all your vaccines are up-to-date, including vaccines for tetanus and hepatitis.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.