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TOPIC: Universal Precautions

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What are universal precautions?

Blood and other body fluids (i.e., semen, vaginal fluids, saliva, urine, feces, vomit) can contain viruses and bacteria that can be passed on to another person through direct contact. Hepatitis B & C and HIV are diseases that can be transferred from one person to another through contact with infected blood and/or body fluids. Since there is no way to know without testing if a person has hepatitis B or C or HIV, it is recommended that you treat all body fluids as though they were infected. Universal Precautions are actions that you take to place a barrier between yourself and potentially infected body fluids.

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How are blood and body fluids passed from one person to another?

- Through open areas on the skin
- By splashing in the eye
- Through the mouth
- Unprotected sexual activity (oral, anal and vaginal)
- Injury with contaminated needles or other sharps
- Prenatally (mother to baby) and during delivery

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How can I protect myself from blood and body fluids?

The easiest way to protect yourself from blood and body fluids is to have the injured person treat their own wound. If they are unable to take care of themselves, or they need some help, use latex gloves. If you do not have disposable gloves available, use a plastic bag (trash, shopping, or sandwich) over your hands to create a barrier. Your employer must provide appropriate personal protective equipment (gloves, goggles, disinfectant, etc.) for your use while at work. Know where these items are located so that you will be better prepared to protect yourself.

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How do I safely handle a bleeding injury?

1. The child or adult should hold an absorbent material to the wound - a clean disposable diaper offers a good absorbent material with the added protection of a plastic backing. You can also use paper towels, tissue, or newspaper.
2. Have them hold pressure until the bleeding stops.
3. Assist with placing a band aid or bandage over the wound if needed.
4. Dispose of bloody material in a plastic lined trash can or sealed plastic bag.
5. Everyone should wash his or her hands with soap & running water as soon as possible (disinfectant waterless hand cleaners or towelettes may be used if soap and running water are not available).

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How do I clean surfaces that have blood and body fluids on them?

1. WEAR DISPOSABLE GLOVES.
2. Wash the area with soap and water, and dry the area.
3. Disinfect the surface with a solution of one part bleach to ten parts water, or you can use a hospital-strength disinfectant (i.e., Lysol, Cavicide, or NABC). Allow the area to remain wet for at least 3 minutes, before drying. consult the container label for differences in recommendations due to product strength.
4. Use disposable cleaning materials if possible, such as paper towels instead of cloth.
5. Dispose of cleaning materials and gloves in a sealed plastic bag.
6. Wash hands with soap and running water (disinfectant waterless hand cleaners or towelettes may be used if soap and running water are not available).

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or your local health department.

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