

# Hepatitis B: Another Bloodborne Pathogen

The risk of contracting Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection at work is greater than that of getting HIV infection because the HBV virus lives longer outside the body than HIV. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 12,000 workers in health care settings become infected each year. Although most will recover, between 500-600 become sick enough to be hospitalized. OVER 200 HEALTH CARE WORKERS DIE EACH YEAR AS A RESULT OF THE INFECTION.



## How can I get the Hepatitis B virus (HBV) at work?

There are primarily three ways that you can become infected with HBV on the job:

- If you get stuck with a needle or sharp object contaminated with HBV blood or body fluids;
- If your face (nose, eyes, or mouth) is splashed with HBV blood or blood-contaminated body fluids or these liquids enter through an open sore on your skin.;
- If you are bitten by a person who is infected with HBV.

Away from the job, you may be infected if you have sexual contact with an infected person, share needles with an infected person or are given a blood transfusion with infected blood (This is rare nowadays since blood is screened for HBV in the U.S.).

## How long does it take for the disease to show up?

It takes anywhere from 60 to 90 days for the symptoms of the disease to appear.

## What is Hepatitis B infection?

Hepatitis B infection is caused by a bloodborne pathogen virus (HBV). The HBV infection may cause liver damage, liver cancer, or death.

## What are some of the symptoms of HBV infection?

The symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- Abdominal discomfort (stomach pains)
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Pain in joints
- Jaundice
- Mild fever



### How can I protect myself from Hepatitis B?

There are several ways that you can protect yourself on the job against exposure. You must practice *Universal Precautions*, which simply means that you treat all body fluids as though they are infected. You should wear gloves, gowns, and masks and follow specific procedures which have been developed and implemented in your place of work.

The Bloodborne Pathogen Standard requires that your agency have a written Exposure Control Plan if you are potentially at risk for exposure. Ask to see your Agency's plan and read about the methods available to protect yourself. If you have questions or want further information, do not hesitate to ask.

### Is there a vaccine for Hepatitis B?

Yes, there is a vaccine. The vaccination is a non-infectious, yeast-based vaccine given in a series of three injections. Because it is prepared from yeast cultures rather than human blood or plasma, there is no risk of contamination from other bloodborne pathogens nor is there any chance of developing HBV or any other disease from the vaccine. The Hepatitis B vaccine provides 90% protection for 7 years or longer.

The Hepatitis B vaccine must be offered to **All** workers who have potential exposure to blood or body fluids on the job at no cost to the employee. Test evaluation and follow-up must be provided by the agency.

If you refuse the vaccine you must sign a waiver acknowledging that the benefits of vaccination have been provided. If you change your mind later, your agency must still provide you with the vaccine. Remember, you have to get 3 injections over a 6 month period. If you do not receive all three injections, you will have minimal protection.



### If you are exposed to contaminated blood or body fluids on the job and have not received a vaccine to date:

- See a doctor. Steps can be taken to protect your health.
- Ask for the Hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG) injection immediately after exposure.
- Inform your employer of the accident by filing a report.
- Keep a copy of the notice of injury.

For more information contact your Union Representative or the DC 37 Safety and Health Unit.