

Employee Factsheet

Blood-Borne Viruses in the Workplace

What are blood-borne viruses?

BBVs are viruses that some people carry in their blood and which may cause severe disease in certain people and few or no symptoms in others.

The virus can spread to another person, whether the carrier of the virus is ill or not.

The main BBVs of concern are:

- ❖ Hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C and D virus, which all cause hepatitis, a disease of the liver;
- ❖ Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), affecting the body's immune system.

How can BBVs be spread at work?

Infection from BBVs can be transmitted between people by blood or other body fluids. For example:

- ❖ via blood or saliva contact into open wounds;
- ❖ from accidental penetration injury by contaminated needles, including needles discarded by injecting drug users;
- ❖ accidental penetration injury during clinical procedures involving sharps e.g. diabetes blood sugar level lancets

What to do if you find a discarded needle or syringe

Finding a used needle or syringe can be worrying. Although there is little risk of contracting HIV infection, there is a very small chance that any cut or injury caused by a used needle could result in Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, tetanus or similar infection.

Children should be told to immediately inform an adult if they find a discarded needle, but not to touch or play with it.

How to dispose of used needles and syringes

1. Find a container, e.g. a coke can/bottle, or glass jar with a secure lid. The container needs to be made of strong material that is unable to be pierced.

2. Wear thick gloves (e.g. gardening gloves) when handling needles or syringes.
3. Take the container to the needles and avoid carrying used needles around. Pick up and hold the syringe by the base and not the point of the needle.
4. Once you have safely secured the needle and syringe, you can take them to a needle exchange pharmacy, GP, The BRIDGE Project or Project Six where they will be safely disposed of.
5. In the event of finding a number of needles please call 01274 431000

What to do in the event of a contamination (Bite, Splash, Sharp or Needle stick) injury

Run the wound under a running tap of warm water for at least 5 minutes encouraging the wound to bleed; **do not suck the wound**.

Cover with a waterproof dressing.

Attend your nearest Casualty or A&E, giving details of the injury. You should follow any advice given.

Report the incident to your manager, who must ensure that the incident is reported to Occupational Safety and Employee Health and Wellbeing.

Personal Responsibility

It is very unlikely that you will become infected through everyday social contact with another worker who has a BBV.

You have a duty to take care of your own health and safety and that of others affected by your actions.

You should cooperate with your employer and make full use of control measures put into place to reduce the risks.

You are not obliged to disclose if you have a BBV or to take a medical test for it.

If an employee is known to have a BBV, this information is strictly confidential and must not be passed on to anyone else without the employee's permission.