

Exposure to Infected Blood or Other Body Fluids Information for Occupational Settings

Some occupations put employees at risk of contact with infected blood or other body fluids. Examples include health care, police, firefighter and paramedic work. This fact sheet is a guide for professionals who are at a higher risk of exposure.

What is an exposure of concern?

Communicable infections like hepatitis B, hepatitis C and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) can spread if you come in contact with the body fluids of an infected person.

An **exposure of concern** occurs when the blood or body fluid of another person (called the **source**) comes in contact with your body cavity (ex: mouth, eyes, nose); subcutaneous tissue; damaged skin (rash, cuts, wounds) or any mucous membrane (nose, eye).

Blood, semen and vaginal secretions along with fluids such as cerebrospinal, synovial, pleural, pericardial, amniotic and peritoneal also put professionals at risk for infection. Urine and vomit can also put you at risk if they contain visible blood.

How can I prevent exposure?

On-the-job prevention is very important and you must use appropriate infection-control measures. Routine precautions, such as wearing gloves and safety eye protection, should be standard practice

for you at work, to prevent exposure to infection.

What do I do if I am exposed?

Report all incidents of workplace exposure to a supervisor as recommended by established workplace post-exposure policy.

Following an exposure of concern, it is critical that you get prompt medical assessment and treatment. Ideally, you should see a doctor within two to four hours of exposure and NOT LONGER than 72 hours. Treatment may include:

- a baseline test for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C
- post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment

Whenever it is possible, current standard practice is to test the source person for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C as soon as possible. Please remember that a **negative test result may not rule out an infection if the source person was infected recently.**

How can I find out if the source person is infected?

If you are concerned that the source has an infection, you can ask to have the person tested for hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV. The person may or may not take the blood test voluntarily.

If the source person has refused (or you think the person will refuse) to be tested, you may use *The Testing of Bodily Fluids and Disclosure Act*. This provincial law allows you to apply for a court order to ensure the other person gets a blood test for hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.

Who can apply for a court order to get the testing done?

You can apply for a court order to do testing, if you have come in contact with blood or body fluid from another person as a result of:

- being the victim of a crime
- providing emergency medical assistance
- performing your duties as a firefighter, emergency medical responder, registered nurse, registered psychiatric nurse, licensed practical nurse, health care aide or peace officer
- other situations defined by provincial regulation

There are two types of court orders for testing: expedited or standard.

Expedited court orders for testing can be made by a Judicial Justice of the Peace (JJP). The application is made at a provincial court office, or if necessary, by telephone and fax.

If you make an application by telephone and fax, you must call the JJP co-ordinator at 204-945-1699, or toll free 1-866-748-7851, between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. to arrange for an application hearing.

You don't need to show a physician's report or medical assessment to receive the court order.

Orders are granted based on a risk assessment, which takes into account the type of body fluids and the type of contact.

If an order is granted, the applicant must arrange to have the order given to the person to be tested. The order will be invalid if not served within 21 days of the date issued by the court. The order will also become invalid if the person to be tested objects formally to the court within 24 hours of being served. If the expedited order becomes invalid, you may still apply for a standard court order for testing.

You can find out if an objection to an expedited testing order has been registered by calling the JJP co-ordinator at the numbers listed above.

To apply for a **Standard** court order, you must do so through the Court of Queen's Bench and provide a physician's report. The physician's report must address:

- your need for a baseline test to determine whether there is a chance you could already be infected with one of the diseases
- whether the testing order would allow you to reduce the risk to your own health

If a standard court order for testing is granted, a copy of it for tracking purposes should be provided to Cadham Provincial Laboratory at:

750 William Avenue
Winnipeg MB R3E 3J7
E-mail: cadham@gov.mb.ca
Phone: 204 945-6123

Where are the test results sent?

The results of tests done under an order will be sent to a physician who you designate. The physician will provide the results to you. This can be your family physician or an occupational physician in your workplace. If you do not designate a physician to receive the results, they will be sent to a Medical Officer of Health who will provide them to you.

Note: No matter what you choose to do about having the other person tested or getting a court order, your first

move must be to go immediately to an emergency room for assessment and treatment. Advise the triage staff that you have had a potential exposure to a blood-borne communicable disease so that you can be triaged appropriately.

For more information

Talk to your doctor or contact Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; elsewhere in Manitoba, call toll free 1-888-315-9257.