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## Universal Precautions

What the heck is Universal Precautions? And what do people mean when they say “blood-borne pathogens?”

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) defines **Universal Precautions** as an approach to infection control to treat all human blood and body fluids as if they contain **blood-borne pathogens**. Blood-borne pathogens are microscopic organisms found in human blood that can cause disease.

### How can we protect ourselves?

#### Universal precautions include:

- Using disposable gloves and other protective barriers (goggles, gown, mask) while examining all patients and while handling needles, scalpels, and other sharp instruments.
- Washing hands and other skin surfaces that are contaminated with blood or body fluids immediately after a procedure or examination. (Don't forget – wash hands for at least 20 seconds!!)
- Changing gloves between patients and **never** reusing gloves.

#### UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS APPLY TO THE FOLLOWING BODY FLUIDS:

- Blood
- Semen and vaginal secretions
- Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)
- Synovial fluid
- Pleural fluid
- Pericardial fluid
- Amniotic fluid

## HOW ARE BLOODBORNE PATHOGENS SPREAD?

According to the American National Red Cross: "Blood borne pathogens, such as bacteria and viruses, are present in blood and body fluids and can cause disease in humans.

The blood-borne pathogens of primary concern are **hepatitis A, B, C** and **HIV**. Other infections that can be transmitted by contact with blood or body fluids include staph and strep infections, shingles, pneumonia, syphilis, TB, malaria, measles, herpes, and chicken pox.

These and other blood borne pathogens are spread primarily through:

- **Direct contact.** Infected blood or body fluid from one person enters another person's body at a correct entry site, such as infected blood splashing in the eye.
- **Indirect contact.** A person's skin touches an object that contains the blood or body fluid of an infected person, such as picking up soiled dressings contaminated with an infected person's blood or body fluid.
- **Respiratory droplet transmission.** A person inhales droplets from an infected person, such as through a cough or sneeze.
- **Vector-borne transmission.** A person's skin is penetrated by an infectious source, such as an insect bite.

**Protect yourself and others by always wearing gloves when coming in contact with blood or body fluids. If you don't have gloves, wash your hands thoroughly as soon as possible.**

Resources:

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

[www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)