

Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogen Incidents

If an employee is involved in a bloodborne pathogen exposure incident, OSHA requires that employers make immediate medical evaluation and follow-up available.

Reporting an exposure incident

Exposure incidents should be reported immediately to the employer since they can lead to infection. When a worker reports an exposure incident right away, the report permits the employer to arrange for immediate medical evaluation of the worker. Early reporting is crucial to address possible infection of the worker and can also help the worker avoid spreading bloodborne infections to others. Furthermore, the employer is required to perform a timely evaluation of the circumstances surrounding the exposure incident to find ways of preventing such a situation from occurring again.

Reporting is also important because part of the follow-up includes identifying the source individual. If the status of the source individual is not already known, the employer is required to test the source's blood as soon as possible, provided the source consents. If the individual does not agree, state or local law may allow testing without the source individual's consent. The results of these tests must be made available to the exposed worker and the worker must be informed of the laws and regulations about disclosing the source's identity and infectious status.

Medical evaluation and follow-up

When a worker experiences an exposure incident, the employer is required to make immediate, confidential medical evaluation and follow-up available. This evaluation and follow-up must be: made available at no cost to the worker and at a reasonable time and place; performed by or under the supervision of a licensed physician or other licensed health care professional; and according to the recommendations of the

U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). In addition, laboratory tests must be conducted by an accredited laboratory and also must be at no cost to the worker. A worker who participates in post-exposure evaluation and follow-up may consent to have his or her blood drawn and has the option to withhold consent for HIV testing at that time. In this instance, the employer must ensure that the worker's blood sample is preserved for at least 90 days in case the worker changes his or her mind about HIV testing. The post-exposure follow-up must include counseling the worker about the possible implications of the exposure and his or her infection status, including the results and interpretation of all tests and how to protect personal contacts. The follow-up must also include evaluation of reported illnesses that may be related to the exposure.

Written opinion

The employer must obtain and provide the worker with a copy of the evaluating healthcare professional's written opinion within 15 days of completion of the evaluation. According to OSHA's standard, the written opinion should only include: whether hepatitis B vaccination was recommended for the exposed worker; whether or not the worker received the vaccination, and that the healthcare provider informed the worker of the results of the evaluation. Any findings other than these are not to be included in the written report.

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