

Occupational Hazards in Home Health Care



(Lack of) Personal Protective Equipment

Employee exposure to hazardous processes or infectious materials or chemicals due to inappropriate or lack of PPE.



Possible Solutions

General PPE: Protective equipment, including personal protective equipment for eyes, face, head, and extremities, protective clothing, respiratory devices, and protective shields and barriers, shall be provided, used, and maintained in a sanitary and reliable condition wherever it is necessary by reason of hazards of processes or environment, chemical hazards, radiological hazards, or mechanical irritants encountered in a manner capable of causing injury or impairment in the function of any part of the body through absorption, inhalation or physical contact.

For example:

- Provide PPE as appropriate when exposed to hazards such as cleaning detergents, chemicals, and hazardous drugs.
- Medical Services and First Aid ([1910.151\(c\)](#)). Where the eyes or body of any person may be exposed to injurious corrosive materials, suitable facilities for quick drenching or flushing of the eyes and body shall be provided within the work area for immediate emergency use.
- Hand Protections [1910.138\(a\)](#). General requirements. Employers shall select and require employees to use appropriate hand protection when employees' hands are exposed to hazards such as those from skin absorption of harmful substances; severe cuts or lacerations; severe abrasions; punctures; chemical burns; thermal burns; and harmful temperature extremes.

PPE and the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard:

PPE is required by the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard if exposure to blood and [other potentially infectious materials \(OPIM\)](#) is anticipated and where occupational exposure remains, after institution of engineering and work practice controls. PPE can provide some protection from infectious materials as a barrier to protect skin and mucus membranes from contact with blood and other potentially infectious materials.

- Appropriate PPE, addressed in (1910.1030(d)(3)(i)), must be provided by the employer, cleaned and laundered and disposed of, at no cost to the employee, in appropriate sizes and used by personnel if blood exposure is anticipated. PPE includes gloves, gowns, laboratory coats, masks, face shields, eye protection, mouthpieces, resuscitation bags, pocket masks, or other ventilation devices.
- Employees must wear gloves when hand contact with blood, mucous membranes, OPIM, or non-intact skin is anticipated, and when performing vascular access procedures, or when handling contaminated items or surfaces.
- Employees must wash hands immediately or as soon as feasible after removing gloves or other PPE.
- The employer shall ensure that employees who have contact with contaminated laundry wear protective gloves and other appropriate personal protective equipment.
- PPE: will be considered "appropriate" only if it does not permit blood or other potentially infectious materials to pass through to or reach the employee's work clothes, street clothes, undergarments, skin, eyes, mouth, or other mucous membranes under normal conditions of use and for the duration of time which the protective equipment will be used.

Disposal of Protective Clothing: as required by the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard:

- Employees must remove protective clothing before leaving the room, and dispose of it in an appropriately designated area or container for storage, washing, decontamination, or disposal.
- Employees must provide information the types, proper use, location, removal, handling, decontamination, and disposal of personal protective equipment.

Some general PPE Guidelines include:

- Wear gloves, when handling chemicals and/or body fluids.
- Wear safety shoes/boots/covers if hazardous substance is likely to splash.
- Wear an apron/gown/coveralls- if hazardous substance is likely to splash.
- Use a respirator: when hazardous substance is airborne such as tuberculosis.
- Wear hearing protection: for loud noises such as from equipment.
- Remove PPE carefully to avoid contaminating yourself.
- Dispose of PPE in designated containers before leaving area.

Additional Information:

- [Personal Protective Equipment](#), Safety and Health Topics Page.
- [Assessing the Need for Personal Protective Equipment: A Guide for Small Business Employers](#). OSHA Publication 3151 (1997), 56 pages, 189KB PDF file.
- [Personal Protection Equipment Course](#). Free training course on personal protective equipment.
- [OSHA Fact Sheet - 93-03](#). Eye protection in the workplace.