

Occupational Hazards in Home Health Care



(Lack of) **Universal Precautions**

Potential Hazard

Employee exposure to bloodborne pathogens from blood and [Other Potentially Infectious Materials \(OPIM\)](#) because employees are not using Universal Precautions.

- Bloodborne pathogens are pathogenic microorganisms that are present in human blood and can cause disease in humans.
- Some infections that can be transmitted through contact with blood and body

fluids include:

- HIV, Hepatitis A, B, C, Staph and Strep infections, Gastroenteritis/salmonella, and shigella, Pneumonia, Syphilis, TB, Malaria, Measles, Chicken Pox, Herpes, Urinary tract infections, and Blood infections. The greatest risks are from HIV and Hepatitis B and C.



Possible Solutions.

Use Universal Precautions. Universal precautions is an approach to infection control to treat all human blood and certain human body fluids as if they were known to be infectious for HIV, HBV and other bloodborne pathogens, (Bloodborne Pathogens Standard 1910.1030(b) definitions).

- Bloodborne Pathogen Standard requires:
 - Employees to observe Universal Precautions to prevent contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM).
 - Under circumstances in which differentiation between body fluid types is difficult or impossible, all body fluids shall be considered potentially infectious materials.
 - Treat all blood and other potentially infectious materials with appropriate precautions such as:
 - Use gloves, masks, and gowns if blood or OPIM exposure is anticipated.
 - Use engineering and work practice controls to limit exposure.

OPIM is defined in 1910.1030(b) as:

- The following human body fluids: semen, vaginal secretions, cerebrospinal fluid, synovial fluid, pleural fluid, pericardial fluid, peritoneal fluid, amniotic fluid, saliva in dental procedures, any body fluid that is visibly contaminated with blood, and all body fluids in situations where it is difficult or impossible to differentiate between body fluids;
- Any unfixed tissue or organ (other than intact skin) from a human (living or dead); and
- HIV-containing cell or tissue cultures, organ cultures, and HIV- or HBV-containing culture medium or other solutions; and blood, organs, or other tissues from experimental animals infected with HIV or HBV.

The Bloodborne Pathogens Standard allows for hospitals to use acceptable alternatives [OSHA Directive [CPL 2-2.69](#)] to universal precautions:

- Alternative concepts in infection control are called Body Substance Isolation (BSI) and Standard Precautions. These methods define all body fluids and substances as infectious. These methods incorporate not only the fluids and materials covered by the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard but expands coverage to include all body fluids and substances.
- These concepts are acceptable alternatives to universal precautions, provided that facilities utilizing them adhere to all other provisions of the standard.
- For compliance with OSHA Standards, the use of either Universal Precautions or Standard Precautions are acceptable.
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The CDC recommends Standard Precautions for the care of all patients, regardless of their diagnosis or presumed infection status.

- Standard Precautions apply to 1) blood; 2) all body fluids, secretions, and excretions, except sweat, regardless of whether or not they contain visible blood; 3) non-intact skin; and 4) mucous membranes. Standard precautions are designed to reduce the risk of transmission of microorganisms from both recognized and unrecognized sources of infection in hospitals.
 - Standard precautions includes the use of: hand washing, appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves, gowns, masks, whenever touching or exposure to patients' body fluids is anticipated.
- Transmission-Based Precautions (i.e., Airborne Precautions, Droplet Precautions, and Contact Precautions), are recommended to provide additional precautions beyond Standard Precautions to interrupt transmission of pathogens in hospitals.
 - Transmission-based precautions can be used for patients with known or suspected to be infected or colonized with epidemiologically important pathogens that can be transmitted by airborne or droplet transmission or by contact with dry skin or contaminated surfaces. These precautions should be used in addition to standard precautions.
 - Airborne Precautions used for infections spread in small particles in the air such as chicken pox.
 - Droplet Precautions used for infections spread in large droplets by coughing, talking, or sneezing such as influenza.
 - Contact Precautions used for infections spread by skin to skin contact or contact with other surfaces such as herpes simplex virus.
 - Airborne Precautions, Droplet Precautions, and Contact Precautions. May be combined for diseases that have multiple routes of transmission. When used either singularly or in combination, they are to be used in addition to Standard Precautions.

Additional Information:

- [Guideline for Isolation Precautions in Hospitals](#). CDC Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion, 1996.
- [Bloodborne Infectious Diseases HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B Virus, and Hepatitis C Virus](#). NIOSH links.