

# Preventing Body Fluid Exposure

Blood or body fluids such as urine, feces, semen, vaginal secretions, saliva, or breast milk may contain germs (*bacteria* or *viruses*) that can cause infections. The best way to prevent infection from these germs is to prevent body fluid exposure.

## How can body fluid exposure affect me?

Germs can be spread when an infected person's body fluids come into contact with the mouth, nose, eyes, genitals, or broken skin of another person.

## What can increase my risk?

You are more likely to be exposed to infected body fluids if you:

- Are a health care worker or family member who is taking care of a sick person.
- Use needles to inject drugs, and you share needles with other users.
- Have sex or engage in other sexual activities without using a condom or other protection.

## What actions can I take to prevent body fluid exposure?

- Wash and disinfect countertops and other surfaces regularly.
- Wear appropriate protective gear, such as gloves, gowns, masks, or eyewear, when the risk of exposure is present.
- Wipe away spills of body fluid with disposable towels and clean the area with a disinfectant.
- Properly dispose of blood products and other fluids. Use secured bags.
- Avoid recapping needles.
- Properly dispose of needles and other instruments with sharp points or edges (*sharps*). Use closed containers that are marked for sharps.
- Avoid injection drug use.
- **Do not** share needles.
- Use a condom during sex.
- Use small plastic sheets (*dental dams*) to cover your mouth, vagina, or anus to reduce the risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections during oral sex.
- Learn and follow any guidelines for preventing exposure (*universal precautions*) that are provided at your workplace.



## What actions can I take to reduce my chances of getting an infection?

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer.
- Make sure your vaccines are up to date, including vaccines for tetanus and hepatitis.
- Avoid having multiple sexual partners.
- Consider pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV if you:
  - Are in an ongoing relationship with an HIV-positive partner.



- Have multiple sexual partners and engage in unprotected sex.
- Have sex with high-risk partners.
- Consider post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV with medicines (*antiretrovirals*) after unprotected sex. To be most effective, this must be started within 72 hours of a possible exposure.

## **What actions can I take to avoid spreading infection to others?**

- Keep open wounds covered.
- Dispose of any items with blood on them by putting them in the trash. This includes razors, tampons, and bandages.
- **Do not** share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, or dental floss.
- **Do not** share drug supplies with others. These include needles, syringes, straws, and pipes.
- Follow all instructions from your health care provider for preventing the spread of infection.

## **Where to find more information**

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH): [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

## **Summary**

- The best way to prevent infection from germs that are spread by blood or body fluids is to prevent body fluid exposure.
- Wear appropriate protective gear, such as gloves, gowns, masks, or eyewear, when the risk of exposure is present.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer.
- Follow all instructions from your health care provider for preventing the spread of infection.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.