

Construction micro-organisms: Blood-borne viruses from needlestick injuries

Construction workers may be exposed to blood-borne viruses (BBV) such as Hepatitis B, C and HIV – eg from needlestick injuries. This page tells you how to control this risk and why. You also need to be aware of the [general information on micro-organisms](#)^[1].

What you must do

Follow the [Assess, Control and Review mode](#)^[2]. Pay particular attention to the following things:

Assess

Identify and Assess: The risk of BBV through needlestick injuries is mainly during work on derelict buildings or other areas where drug misuse is known. The risk of infection depends on:

- whether the needle user was infected with a BBV
- the type of BBV and how infectious it is
- how much of this infected material enters the bloodstream - a needle attached to a syringe containing blood is likely to be higher risk than a needle on its own - not all exposures result in infection.

There may also be a risk of [tetanus](#)^[3] from such incidents. It is better to consider that all needles found could be potentially infected. Therefore, the risk needs to be controlled.

Control

Control: Where BBVs are known / assumed to be present, control this risk by:

- **General controls** – follow the [general controls for harmful micro-organisms](#)^[4]. Pay particular attention to:
 - following good basic hygiene including regular hand-washing and avoiding hand to mouth/eye etc contact
 - taking rest breaks, including meals and drinks, away from the work area
 - covering all cuts, abrasions and other breaks in the skin with waterproof dressings and/or gloves

- **Sharps containers** – these are boxes that can safely hold needles. Do not use plastic sacks etc. Do not overfill boxes. This material is classed as clinical waste. The collection, storage and disposal of this waste is subject to strict controls.
- **Equipment** – use the right equipment for picking up sharps; eg pincer tools, tongs, litter pickers dustpan and hand brush.
- **Gloves** – always wear gloves when using tools to move needles. Gloves should give a high degree of puncture resistance. They do not provide adequate protection on their own, but give secondary protection in the case of accidental contact.
- **Clothing** – where appropriate, also consider suitable puncture/ cut-resistant clothing to help protect limbs.
- **First aid** – encourage the wound to bleed if the skin is punctured – do not suck the wound. Rinse thoroughly under running water. Wash out splashes to the eyes and to the nose / mouth with plenty of water – do not swallow the water. It is important to get prompt medical advice on any treatment needed.
- **Vaccination** – immunisation is available for Hepatitis B but not other BBVs. This should only be used after appropriate advice and where needed to supplement the controls above. You should ensure that workers are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of immunisation as well as its limitations. Keep adequate records of any immunisation provided. Follow the [information on vaccination in the general page for harmful micro-organisms](#)^[5].

Train: Workers need good information about the risks and what they should do if they suffer a needlestick injury.

Review

Supervise: Ensure that controls such as work methods, PPE and welfare are effective and used by the workers.

What you should know

Blood-borne viruses (BBVs) are viruses that some people carry in their blood and can be spread from one person to another. Those infected with a BBV may show little or no symptoms of serious disease, but other infected people may be severely ill. You can become infected with a virus whether the person who infects you appears to be ill or not – indeed, they may be unaware they are ill as some persistent viral infections do not cause symptoms. The most common BBVs are:

- **HIV**^[6]

- [Hepatitis B](#)^[7]
- [Hepatitis C](#)^[8]

Link URLs in this page

1. general information on micro-organisms
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/harmful-micro-organisms.htm>
2. Assess, Control and Review model
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/managing-essentials/managing-essentials.htm>
3. tetanus
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/harmful-micro-organisms/tetanus.htm>
4. general controls for harmful micro-organisms
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/harmful-micro-organisms.htm>
5. information on vaccination in the general page for harmful micro-organisms
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/harmful-micro-organisms.htm>
6. HIV
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/blood-borne-viruses/hiv.htm>
7. Hepatitis B
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/blood-borne-viruses/hepatitis-b.htm>
8. Hepatitis C
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/blood-borne-viruses/hepatitis-c.htm>