

One way the employer can protect workers against exposure to bloodborne pathogens, such as hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS, is by providing and ensuring they use personal protective equipment, or PPE. Wearing appropriate PPE can significantly reduce risk, since it acts as a barrier against exposure. Employers are required to provide, clean, repair, and replace this equipment as needed, and at no cost to workers.

Selecting Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment may include gloves, gowns, laboratory coats, face shields or masks, eye protection, pocket masks, and other protective gear. The PPE selected must be appropriate for the task. This means the level and type of protection must fit the expected exposure. For example, gloves may be the only PPE needed for a laboratory technician who is drawing blood. However, a pathologist conducting an autopsy would need much more protective clothing because of the different types of exposure (e.g., splashes, sprays) and the increased amount of blood and OPIM that are encountered. PPE must be readily accessible to workers and available in appropriate sizes.

If it can be reasonably expected that a worker could have hand contact with blood, OPIM, or contaminated surfaces or items, the employer must ensure that the worker wears gloves. Single-use gloves cannot be washed or decontaminated for reuse. Utility gloves may be decontaminated

they show signs of cracking, peeling, tearing, puncturing, or deteriorating. Non-latex gloves, glove liners, powderless gloves or similar alternatives must be provided if workers are allergic to the gloves normally provided.

Gloves are required for all phlebotomies outside of volunteer blood donation centers. If an employer in a volunteer blood donation center judges that routine gloving for all phlebotomies is not necessary, then the employer is required to periodically re-evaluate this policy; make gloves available for workers who want to use them; and cannot discourage their use. In addition, employers must ensure that workers in volunteer blood donation centers use gloves (1) when they have cuts, scratches or other breaks in their skin, (2) while they are in training, or (3) when the worker believes that hand contamination might occur.

When splashes, sprays, splatters, or droplets of blood or OPIM pose a hazard to the eyes, nose or mouth, then masks in conjunction with eye protection (such as goggles or glasses with solid side shields) or chin-length face shields must be worn. Protection against exposure to the body is provided by protective clothing, such as gowns, aprons, lab coats, and similar garments. Surgical caps or hoods, and shoe covers or boots are needed when gross contamination is expected, such as during orthopedic surgery or autopsies.

In HIV and HBV research laboratories and production facilities, laboratory coats, gowns, smocks, uniforms, or other appropriate protective clothing must be used in work areas and animal rooms. Also, protective clothing must not be worn outside of the work area and must be decontaminated before being laundered.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or