

Bloodborne Infections (hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV) in Food Service Workers, and Cleaning of Employee Blood Spills in Food Establishments

Can people with hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV safely work in food facilities?

Yes. These infections are “bloodborne”. This means that the viruses that cause these infections are found in blood and body fluids (such as semen, vaginal fluids, breast milk, saliva) of those who are infected. For an infection to occur, the virus must be introduced into another person’s bloodstream (through blood transfusions, sexual contact, sharing of needles, etc.). Food has not been demonstrated to be a source of these infections.^{1, 2, 3} As such, the Alberta Public Health Act does not restrict individuals with hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV from working in occupations involving the handling of food. Food workers who have these infections are not required to inform their supervisor.

What about hepatitis A—Is it a concern in food facilities?

Hepatitis A can be spread through food. Those infected with hepatitis A must not handle food to be served to others until the Medical Officer of Health deems the individual non-infectious. However, this infection is very different from hepatitis B and C. Contact Environmental Public Health Services (see phone number below) for more information about hepatitis A.

What if a food worker cuts his/her skin and blood is drawn?

Food workers sometimes work with sharp equipment, which can result in accidental cuts to the skin; care must be taken in the cleaning of surfaces that become contaminated with blood. Public health information about these issues is provided below. All blood should be treated as being potentially infectious. For the safety of other employees, the following procedures are recommended when foodservice workers experience a cut that draws blood:

1. The worker should receive appropriate first aid.
2. If the cut cannot be bandaged in a way that prevents contamination of food or food contact surfaces, the worker should not resume foodservice duty.
3. Gloves should be worn over bandaged cuts to the hand while on duty.
4. Surfaces and equipment that may have been contaminated with blood will require prompt cleaning and disinfection (see #7). Those carrying out the cleaning should wear gloves, and should wash their hands afterwards. Use additional protective equipment, as needed, to protect personal clothing, the mouth, and eyes.
5. Food contaminated with blood should be immediately discarded.
6. Articles contaminated with blood that are not easily cleaned (i.e. absorbent surfaces, articles with cracks/crevices) should also be discarded.
7. Blood on surfaces and equipment should first be removed (blotted) with disposable towels. The contaminated surface should then be cleaned with a detergent solution (using cleaning cloths), rinsed with clean water, then disinfected with household bleach solution using one part household bleach to nine parts water. The area should then be left to air dry for ten minutes.⁴

8. Clothing contaminated with blood can be washed with the regular laundry.
9. Paper towels, cleaning cloths and gloves should be placed in a leak-proof garbage bag and disposed of with the regular trash.

What if someone eats food that might have been contaminated by human blood?

Contact Capital Health Link at 408-5465.

References

1. World Health Organization (2000). *Fact Sheet WHO/204: Hepatitis B*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
2. World Health Organization (2000). *Fact Sheet No. 164: Hepatitis C*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
3. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention, Divisions of HIV/AIDS Prevention (2002). *Fact Sheet: HIV and Its Transmission*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control.
4. Anonymous. Preventing the transmission of bloodborne pathogens in health care and public service settings. *Canada Communicable Disease Report* 1997; 23 Suppl 3:i-vii, 1-43, i-vii, 1-52.

For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health Services office.

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