What is a blood or body fluid exposure incident?
An injury or incident which causes exposure to blood or high risk body fluids.

How can this occur?
- Puncture of the skin with a dirty needle or sharp object
- Exposure through cuts or breaks in the skin, e.g. cracked skin
- Splashes of blood or body fluids in the eye or mouth
- Bites and scratches which break the skin

Which body fluids are infectious?

High Risk
Blood, visibly blood-stained body fluids and those derived from blood, e.g. amniotic fluid, vaginal secretion, semen, breast milk, cerebrospinal fluid, peritoneal, pericardial and pleural fluid, saliva in association with dentistry, unfixed tissues and organs, synovial fluid and exudate and other tissue fluid from burns and skin lesions.

Low Risk
Urine, vomit, saliva, faeces with no visible blood staining.

What are the risks from body fluid exposures?
The main general risks from these incidents are infection with blood borne viruses: Hepatitis B, HIV and Hepatitis C.

Hepatitis B
This is a liver disease which can be fatal but which some people may have had without realising. About 10% of people who have recovered from Hepatitis B are still infectious (carriers) although they are perfectly well. There is a danger that a carrier may infect health care workers who come into direct contact with their blood.
The risk of infection from a needlestick injury from a high risk Hepatitis B carrier, if the health care worker has not been immunised, is about 1 in 10. All staff who have direct clinical care duties or who handle clinical waste are strongly advised to be vaccinated against Hepatitis B, which protects against this risk. Contact the Occupational Health Service for more information.

**HIV**
This is a virus which attacks the body’s immune system, reducing the person’s ability to fight certain infections effectively. It may be spread by blood to blood contact between an infected patient and a health care worker. It is less infectious than Hepatitis B but there is no vaccine against it.

If a health worker sustains an injury from an HIV infected patient, a combination of antiviral drugs may be prescribed to reduce the risk of infection. This "post-exposure prophylaxis" needs to be given quickly, ideally within one hour of the incident.

You may wish to give further thought to whether you would wish to take these drugs should you have such an accident. The drugs are potentially toxic and can have unpleasant side effects. Further information is available from the Occupational Health Service.

**Hepatitis C**
This is another blood borne virus which also affects the liver. There is no vaccine against Hepatitis C, nor is there any treatment to reduce the risk of infection should an exposure occur.

**The most important ways of avoiding infection with these diseases are:**

- To observe safe working practices at all times
- To use appropriate protective equipment when needed
- To dispose of clinical waste properly
- To dispose of sharps properly
What to do following exposure to blood or body fluids

1. First aid (speed is essential)
   - For a wound: Encourage bleeding by gently squeezing the site – do not suck. Wash thoroughly in warm running water with soap. Apply a water proof dressing. Do not use antiseptics or alcohol rubs. Do not scrub.
   - For a splash in the eye: Irrigate the eye copiously with water, before and after removing contact lens, if worn.
   - For a splash in the mouth: Irrigate thoroughly for at least five minutes with drinking water. Do not swallow this water.

2. Inform your supervisor or manager

3. Assist your manager to implement the Trust’s protocol
   
   Your manager / supervisor will follow the procedure in the Trust’s protocol for the management of these incidents, which is available in every ward and department.

4. Contact the Occupational Health Service as follows:
   
   Sheffield Occupational Health Service:
   0114 271 4737 (ext 14737)
   Monday – Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm
   Out of hours: The on-call consultant virologist is available through the NGH switchboard.

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Please email: alternativeformats@sth.nhs.uk

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