

Toolbox Talks 2

050: Unsafe Acts: Bloodborne Pathogens

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review any company policies related to handling, containment, and disposal of blood or other biological waste. Your company probably has an *Exposure Control Plan*.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts with bloodborne pathogens.

Discussion notes:

Background

Infected blood can infect you through contact with the eye, nose, mouth, or skin. Or you may have a disease and not yet know it, and your unsafe acts can infect someone else.

The average electrician of today is over 40 years old, and thus grew up long before anyone had heard of AIDS. But since the 1980s, the handling of blood has become a significant safety issue. Four diseases make contact with blood dangerous:

- Hepatitis B. The hepatitis B virus (HBV) can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death.
- Hepatitis C. This is another virus that attacks the liver.
- HIV/AIDS. You can get it from the blood of an infected person, even if that person has no symptoms. Transmission requires contact with blood.
- Viral Hemorrhagic Fever (Includes Ebola and Marburg). This is a group of illnesses caused by several distinct families of viruses. The most common symptom is bleeding, but you can think of these diseases as doing massive damage to the body's various systems and organs.

Unsafe acts with blood

- Letting a cut or puncture go unattended; whether it is yours or a coworker's.
- Waiting to tend to a blood release, rather than tending to it immediately.
- Leaving drops or smears of blood on surfaces others may use.
- Working in an area where blood has been released or found, before verifying it has been properly cleaned up.
- Treating blood cleanup like normal spill cleanup.
- Handling blood, blood cleanup, or blood disposal without the proper PPE.
- Carelessly attending to a blood release in a manner that promotes the spreading of droplets (e.g., spraying, splashing).
- Failing to wash hands and face after a possible blood exposure event.
- Assuming the incident isn't worth reporting (report any injury, no matter how minor).
- Disposing any blood-contaminated items in an unapproved container.

In addition to these unsafe acts with actual blood, consider unsafe acts that result in cuts or scrapes. Pay attention to how you work around sharp objects, rough edges, and other cutting hazards. If someone around you is working carelessly, your safety is at risk. Report the problem to your foreman.

Review and discussion

1. What are four kinds of diseases you can contract from blood contact or spread to others the same way?

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