

ESW Follow up after an Exposure to Blood and Body Fluids

If your health care provider thinks that you may be at risk of contracting a blood-borne disease after being in contact with someone else's blood or body fluids, this fact sheet will help to answer some questions you might have.

What are my chances of getting HIV, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C?

Most people do not get infections from being exposed to someone else's blood or body fluids.

The chance of getting an infection depends on:

- The amount of blood or body fluid involved
- The amount of virus in the blood you were in contact with
- Whether treatment for HIV and/or hepatitis B is started right after your exposure

The health care provider that examined you following the exposure will have assessed your risk of infection and determined your immediate treatment needs.

When will I know if I have gotten one of these viruses as a result of this exposure?

The number of people who become infected with these diseases after being exposed to someone else's blood or body fluids is low. Your health care provider will order blood tests to see if you have come in contact with the HIV, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C viruses.

Initial screening (also referred to as baseline testing)

Baseline testing is done to see if you have been exposed to HIV, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C in the past. This initial screening is done as soon as you determine that you have been in contact with someone else's blood or body fluids.

Follow-up tests

It is important to return for more blood tests 12 weeks after exposure. These tests will determine if you have become infected with HIV, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C. Blood tests need to be performed again at six months to check for hepatitis B or hepatitis C virus. It can take up to six months for these two viruses to show up in someone's blood.

I have started the hepatitis B vaccine. When I do come back for the second and third doses?

The hepatitis B vaccine is made up of three doses (shots). You will get your first dose when you first see your health care provider to talk about your exposure to someone else's blood or body fluid. You will need to see your family physician or come to Public Health one month later for your second shot, and five months after that for your third shot. It is important that you have all three doses.

What do I need to know about the post-exposure prophylaxis (P.E.P.) treatments?

If you have started on post-exposure prophylaxis treatment for HIV, be sure to ask your pharmacist for specific information on the drugs prescribed. The drugs prescribed vary depending on the nature of your exposure.

Some common side effects experienced when taking these medications are as follows:

- Upset stomach including nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Tiredness
- Jaundice and kidney stones (although unlikely in short term treatments)

Always check with your family physician if you experience any side effects or are considering discontinuing treatment.

Is there anything I should or shouldn't do over the next six months until I know whether or not I am infected with one of these blood-borne diseases?

During the next six months, (especially the first 12 weeks) you need to be extra careful to make sure that you don't spread a possible infection to someone else.

- Do not have unprotected sexual intercourse (including vaginal, anal, or oral).
- Use a latex condom each time.
- Do not donate blood, semen, or organs.

Who can I talk to if I have further questions?

You should contact your family physician as soon as you can after you have begun your treatment. Your family physician can answer your questions, or you can talk to one of the public health nurses at Public Health.

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