

# BLOOD BORNE PATHOGENS

## What is Hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. Hepatitis B virus (HBV) can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure and death. HBV is transmitted through blood and infected body fluids. This can occur through direct blood-to-blood contact, unprotected sex, and from an infected woman to her newborn during the delivery process. Other possible routes of infection include sharing contaminated razors, toothbrushes, using unsterile needles for body/ear piercing, tattooing, or acupuncture.
- Symptoms can occur 40-180 days after an individual is infected. Symptoms may be flu-like, lack of appetite, rash, stomach pain, nausea/vomiting, joint pain, jaundice (yellowing of the skin or white part of the eye) and fatigue. Many people have NO symptoms. (Hepatitis B Foundation 2006)
- Most healthy adults (90%) who are infected will recover and develop protective antibodies against future hepatitis B infections. The remaining (10%) will be unable to get rid of the virus and will develop chronic infections.
- A simple blood test can determine if there is an infection. There is also a safe and effective vaccine to protect against hepatitis B. Finally, there are promising new treatments available for those who have developed chronic hepatitis B infections.

## What is Hepatitis C?

- Hepatitis C is a disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV) that attacks the liver. HCV is spread primarily by direct contact with human blood. Infection can occur when there is: sharing of needles because the needle has blood that may contain the virus; sharing items such as razors or toothbrushes with an infected person; mother to baby at birth; recipient of blood/organs before 1992 (before routine testing of these products). Hepatitis C can be spread by sexual activity, but this is not the primary route.
- Symptoms can include jaundice, fatigue, dark urine, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, and nausea. 80% of infected persons have no symptoms.
- There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. Of those infected, 55-85% develop chronic infections and are able to spread the disease for a lifetime. Of those with chronic infection, 70% will develop liver disease (cirrhosis of the liver, liver cancer and death.) Hepatitis C is the leading indication for liver transplants.
- A simple blood test can determine if there is an infection. Medications are available for treatment of chronic hepatitis C.

## What is HIV/AIDS?

- HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that attacks the body's natural immune system and causes it to break down. When a person with HIV starts to have a weakened immune system and develops specific secondary (opportunistic) infections, they are diagnosed as having AIDS.
- HIV may be spread by sexual contact, by sharing needles and/or syringes (primarily for drug injection) with someone who is infected, or less commonly (and now very rarely in countries where blood is screened for HIV antibodies) through transfusions of infected blood or blood clotting factors. Babies born to HIV-infected women may become infected before or during birth or through breast-feeding after birth.
- When first infected with HIV, there may be no symptoms at all, although it's more common to develop a brief flu-like illness two to six weeks after becoming infected. An infected person may remain symptom-free for 8-9 years or more. But, as the virus continues to multiply and destroy immune cells, more serious infections will appear. An infected person can spread the virus even when they have no symptoms.
- HIV infected individuals are living longer and healthier lives due to drug therapy. The anti-retroviral medications reduce the amount of virus in the blood but none of these drugs can cure HIV/AIDS. (CDC 2006)
- If an employee experiences a specific unprotected exposure to blood or other potentially infectious material, the employee will inform their supervisor and contact the school nurse immediately.

**An unprotected exposure is defined as a specific eye, mouth, other mucous membrane, no intact or parenteral contact with blood or other potentially infectious material that results from the performance of an employee's duties.**