

Common questions about infectious diseases

What is AIDS/HIV Infection?

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the **advanced stage of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection**. The virus attacks the body's immune systems, leaving it open to life-threatening infections and malignancies. The virus may also directly attack the central nervous system. Persons infected with HIV often have no apparent symptoms and usually appear to be in good health. More than half of the persons in the United States of America who have been diagnosed with AIDS (the advanced stage of HIV) have died.

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by a virus present in blood and other body fluids of infected persons. Less than 50% of the people who become infected show symptoms of illness. The symptoms – like those of Hepatitis A – include fatigue, mild fever, muscle/joint aches, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, and abdominal pain. In some patients, the urine turns dark and the skin becomes yellow. Symptoms may begin to appear up to six months after exposure to the virus. Death is not common in Hepatitis B, but 5-10% of those infected become long-term carriers. Up to 25% of the carriers may develop serious chronic liver disease.

How Are They Spread?

Both HIV and Hepatitis B can be spread in the following ways:

- Any sexual activity involving direct contact with semen, blood or vaginal secretions of an infected person;
- Sharing intravenous (IV) needles and/or syringes with someone who is infected;
- Penetrating the skin with unsterile objects, such as those used for tattooing, ear piercing, etc.;
- Direct contact of infected blood with cuts, broken skin or mucous membranes of the eye or mouth;
- Receiving blood transfusions or blood products from someone who is infected;
- Being born to an infected mother.

How Can HIV & Hepatitis B Be Prevented?

In the Classroom

The way you are most likely to be exposed to AIDS/HIV infection and Hepatitis B in the school setting is when your broken skin comes directly in contact with the blood of an infected person. Spread of Hepatitis B may sometimes occur in special education settings and classrooms attended by developmentally delayed students who became Hepatitis B carriers while in hospital or residential facilities. The risk of transmitting Hepatitis B in these special education classroom settings can be almost eliminated by good environmental and personal hygiene. Ask your physician about receiving a protective vaccine.

Other Settings

Sexual intercourse and sharing intravenous equipment are the behaviors that most often transmit the viruses that cause Hepatitis B and HIV infections. The major risk of exposure to Hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS, and sexually transmitted diseases in general, can be virtually eliminated if: Your sexual relationship is mutually monogamous and neither you nor your partner is infected; and You refrain from sharing intravenous equipment. Proper use of condoms combined with waterbased lubricants containing spermicide during sexual intercourse greatly reduces the risk of transmission of these diseases. Intravenous equipment and any equipment used to penetrate the skin should not be shared.

The most common infectious diseases found in schools are:

- Common colds
- Flu
- Impetigo
- Pink eye
- Strep throat
- Chicken pox

You will be less likely to come in contact with:

- Hepatitis B
- HIV (the AIDS virus)
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Universal Precautions Can Protect You

- Taking universal precautions will result in fewer illnesses, in general, for you and the people around you.

Other resources:

Oregon OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens: Questions and Answers about Occupational Exposure
<http://www.orosha.org/pdf/pubs/2261.pdf>

