

# HIV & OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE

Does your job put you at possible risk of HIV exposure?

Follow these basic procedures to minimise the likelihood of HIV infection.

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References: [www.avert.org/learn-share/hiv-fact-sheets/occupational-exposure](http://www.avert.org/learn-share/hiv-fact-sheets/occupational-exposure)

  
AVERTing HIV and AIDS

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## What is occupational exposure?

Working in a healthcare setting can raise the risk of HIV exposure through:



contact with sharp equipment



contact with blood.

However the risk of HIV infection is very small, and the risk can be reduced by following the advice given in this fact sheet.

## Types of exposure

3 main types of HIV exposure:



your skin is broken by equipment that has been in contact with a patient's blood



a patient's blood gets into your mucous membrane, such as your eye



a patient's blood gets into an open cut in your skin.

The most likely cause of HIV exposure is from a needle, known as a needlestick injury.

HIV exposure is a risk when you are treating a patient, and also afterwards if medical waste is not disposed of safely, especially needles, syringes and blood bags.

## How am I at risk?

The risk of HIV transmission is greater if:



your injury is deep



you can see blood on the equipment



the equipment (needle) was used in a patient's vein/artery.

## Preventing HIV exposure

**Any patient is potentially HIV-positive; take these precautions with EVERY patient:**



wear protection such as a mask, gown, goggles and gloves



cover up cuts with plasters



handle sharp equipment carefully



dispose of sharp equipment in a solid (sharps) container



clean up blood spills immediately



wash your hands with soap after contact with a patient's blood.

## If you think you have been exposed



Follow any standard procedures in your healthcare setting.



Immediately wash the injury with water and soap.



Encourage bleeding by pressing around the injury.



Report the incident, so that further precautions can be put in place in the future.



If it is possible, enquire about the HIV status of the patient:

- ask a doctor to seek the patient's permission to test for HIV and other blood-borne viruses (you should not do this yourself)
- ensure patient consent is given
- ensure the patient is given help and support after the test results
- the test result may help form your decision about what to do next.
- for example, you may be able to take emergency HIV treatment... see 'If the patient's result is positive'.

## If the patient's result is negative:



talk to a healthcare professional - you will need to re-test for HIV in 3 months in case the patient has an HIV infection that cannot yet be detected.

## If the patient's result is positive:



talk to a healthcare professional - they will assess your risk of HIV infection.



they may suggest you take post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), which is a type of emergency HIV treatment that prevents HIV infection.



You must take it as soon as possible, within 72 hours of HIV exposure, for 28 days.

*Read AVERT's 'Emergency HIV Treatment' fact sheet for more information.*

## HIV test



There is a time delay (window period) in how long it takes an HIV test to detect HIV in your body.



This time delay is between 2 weeks and 3 months after HIV exposure, so any HIV test you have will not be conclusive until then.

*Read AVERT's 'HIV Testing' fact sheet for more information about the window period.*

## Importance of safe medical waste disposal



Contaminated medical equipment is not correctly disposed of in many countries.



It ends up on rubbish sites, which causes a hazard to people working there.



Used needles or syringes could be reused or sold on, to people unaware they are contaminated.



Ensure all your medical waste is disposed of safely in a solid, or 'sharps' container.

## Know your rights

You have the right to:



a safe working environment



not disclose your HIV exposure



a HIV test to confirm your status.

*Remember, you have not done anything wrong; it is important to request support from your employer.*