

# The Importance of Standard Precautions

## Achieving Health Safety for Everyone

Standard precautions require everyone, from daycare workers and teachers to accountants and auto mechanics, to assume that anyone's blood and body fluids may carry hepatitis viruses, HIV or other bloodborne infections.



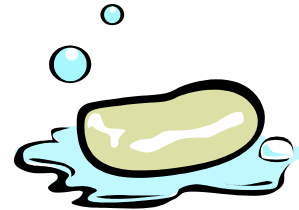
This approach carries a blanket assumption that *anyone* – rich or poor, fat or thin, young or old – may be infected with a virus.

Why this built-in assumption? Because 40 to 90 percent of people with viral hepatitis and other infectious diseases have no symptoms and may be unaware they even have a disease.

Standard precautions are guidelines issued for the care of patients in hospitals but are common sense for everyone and should be used to prevent disease transmission in all walks of life. They require you to always have a barrier between any infectious substance and your skin, eyes, gums or the inside of your nose.

Infectious substances include blood and all body fluids, secretions and excretions, except sweat, even if they do not contain any visible blood. Standard precautions should also be used if you come into contact with badly chapped or any non-intact skin or mucous membranes, even if blood is not visible.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that if you come into contact with feces, nasal secretions, saliva, tears, urine or vomit, you should wear gloves unless the fluid can easily be contained by material, such as a thick cloth. You should always wash your hands thoroughly after these clean-ups.



Everyone working in or attending childcare centers, schools and businesses in the United States should be trained to use standard precautions. When standard precautions are used in all aspects of daily life, they help prevent the spread of infections. Additionally, because standard precautions assume anyone may carry an infection, a child with a chronic, viral infectious disease never has to be singled out, stigmatized or treated differently.

Because there are many children and adults who have chronic, viral infections but don't know it yet, universal application of standard precautions is good sense.

Parents should also practice standard precautions at home. Latex gloves can be purchased at nearly all medical supply stores and drugstores. Keep them in your house and car. Latex gloves should not be used by persons with an allergy to latex. Check with your healthcare provider about available alternatives.

If you don't happen to have gloves and you need to deal with someone's body fluid, put sandwich bags or trash bag liners over your hands. Use a sanitary napkin or thick, rolled-up towel to collect the fluid or staunch the flow of blood.



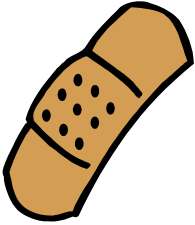
If you wear glasses, keep them on if you have contact with blood. If you don't wear glasses, put on your sunglasses to protect your eyes.

When you clean up body fluids, be careful not to get any of the fluid you are cleaning in your eyes, nose, mouth or any open sores you may have on your hands. Clean and disinfect any surfaces, such as countertops and floors, on which any body fluids have been spilled. Discard fluid-

contaminated material in a plastic bag that has been securely sealed. Employees should follow the policies and procedures at their worksites for disposing of potentially infectious material.

Mops used to clean up body fluids should be cleaned, rinsed with a disinfecting solution, wrung as dry as possible and hung to dry completely. Be sure to wash your hands after cleaning up any spill.

Use a one-part bleach to ten-part water solution or other disinfectant for cleaning up bodily substances, including your own! As soon as you have dealt with the situation, throw away the protective items (your gloves, etc.) in a lined trashcan or plastic bag that is out of the reach of children. Wash your hands thoroughly.



Make sure you keep all cuts and abrasions covered with a waterproof bandage. Be careful with badly chapped skin; it can crack and allow fluids to enter and exit. These precautions are a two-way street. You may be one of the millions unaware that you're living with an infectious disease and you certainly don't want to infect anyone.

No child is too young to learn health safety. Designate a day to role-play standard precautions with your children. Call it Family Safety Day. This would also be a good day to practice evacuating the house in case of fire and all those other safety rules that are seldom rehearsed.

To help kids understand how invisible germs can pass from one person to the next, put glitter on your child's hands and let him/her go to the bathroom, play with family members and pick up a cracker (without actually eating it).

Then, go back to the beginning of the glitter journey and walk around the house, following the trail of glitter. This will help demonstrate to your children how they can pass germs to each other without knowing it. To press home the point, you might put glitter on your hands too.

Have one member of the family "bleed" ketchup. Teach your child to run for an adult when blood is visible. Have your young child go through the same scenario several times. Next, pretend there's no adult around and show your child how to use a plastic bag or towel as a barrier between him or her and the blood.



It's important to teach children never to reach out and touch another person's blood or body fluid. One way to help them understand is to ask them if they would touch someone else's poop or nose gunk. Most kids, no matter how young, will say an emphatic "no." Once you get that all-important "no" response, explain that blood is very personal and they should never touch anyone else's blood.

This approach is necessary only during the preschool years. Once they get to be age five or six, you can start explaining in more detail why these precautions are important.

It's also good to reinforce a household ban on sharing toothbrushes, razors and personal grooming tools, such as nail files and nail clippers. If hypodermic needles are used in the home, it is essential that they be disposed of in a sharps container that children cannot find or open.

*For more information, contact PKIDs at 360.695.0293, [pkids@pkids.org](mailto:pkids@pkids.org) or visit our website at [www.pkids.org](http://www.pkids.org).*