Why You Should Care

Do you work with cell lines, human or animal blood or bodily fluids, viral vectors, recombinant/synthetic nucleic acids, biological toxins, or live pathogens? Exposure to one of these can be a scary thing. Recognizing the hazards associated with your work and following best safety practices can prevent many incidents, but not all of them. Just make sure that the first time you read this GBP is before an accident happens. Here is a list of some recently reported Laboratory Acquired Infections (LAIs) from around the globe.

To prevent accidents, be proactive and think things through. Identify risky procedures in advance so you can take steps to prevent exposures, such as wearing eye protection or using safety sharps. If you have a “near miss” (for example, you almost drop a culture bottle because it is not secured in a rack, or you almost stick yourself with a needle because it was not secured safely) that could happen again, tell your supervisor and try to fix it.

Before Performing First Aid

- Remember that time is of the essence – Do not wait to wash out your wound or seek follow up attention. If you manage to inoculate yourself with a pathogen, the incubation period could be short and the window to receive effective treatment or therapies could be even shorter.
- Stay calm and act fast to minimize potential harm to yourself or others.

First Aid for a Percutaneous Injury

In the event of a percutaneous (through the skin) injury involving biohazardous material, immediately:
1. Wash the site immediately and thoroughly with soap and water (without scrubbing). Do not use harsh detergents or abrasive scrubbing on wounds. This can just exacerbate the injury or introduce new hazards into the body (chemicals, etc.).
2. Do not suck the site with your mouth. You could be contaminating your mouth and digestive tract with the material you are trying to remove from the wound.
3. Follow the “After Performing First Aid” steps below

First Aid for a Mucous Membrane Exposure

In the event of an exposure to the mucous membranes (eyes, nose, mouth) involving biohazardous material, immediately:
1. Flush the affected areas immediately and thoroughly with water. Use an eyewash if available, use cold water, and keep your eyelids open. Do not use harsh detergents or abrasive scrubbing on wounds. This can just exacerbate the injury or introduce new hazards into the body (chemicals, etc.).
2. Follow the “After Performing First Aid” steps below

After Performing First Aid

1. Report the incident immediately to your supervisor. Don’t keep your exposure a secret or wait “a day or two” to say something. This inevitably will do more harm than good. For instance, you could get sick and not receive medical treatment in time for it to be effective. Read about Beth Griffin, who waited too long for medical treatment.
2. Seek medical evaluation at Gannett Health Services, Occupational Medicine or a personal physician. If evaluation and care are provided by a personal physician, contact Occupational Medicine the next business day.
3. Report the details of your exposure event through the University’s Accident Reporting System, https://rmps-prod.hosting.cornell.edu/accinj/ as soon as you can (preferably within 24 hours). This is your official documentation that the incident happened, and allows EHS to come
and work with you to minimize any further incidents in your lab or elsewhere. Further, there may be additional reporting requirements, such as to the NIH, depending on the type of exposure involved. You will not get in trouble with EHS if you submit an accident report, and you will help others who may learn from your experience.

Important Phone Numbers:

In cases of emergency, including those listed above, keep these numbers handy:

- **Dial 911 from the lab** or **255-1111 from your cell phone** if you think this is something you can’t/shouldn’t handle alone. Notify a lab mate and your supervisor as soon as you can…don’t be afraid to ask for help.

- **Gannett Occupational Medicine 255-6960** If you prefer seeing your personal physician for care, please notify Gannett the next business day so that they can help follow up with any related response activities.

- **EHS 255-8200** if you have non-emergency questions. **Do not** call EHS if you are having an emergency.

Where to get training and more information

- Cornell offers first aid training – contact EHS
- Review the EHS First Aid Kit Toolbox Safety Talk
- Review the IBC Incident Reporting Requirements

Visual Guide

Wash the wound immediately and thoroughly. Use soap and water but don’t scrub.

Flush your eyes immediately and thoroughly. Make sure to keep your eyelids open.