

What employers need to know about hazards associated with homelessness



Oregon has one of the highest rates of people experiencing homelessness in the country, and more than 60 percent of them live in unsheltered locations. But the plight of homelessness extends beyond homeless camps to streets, sidewalks, businesses, school playgrounds, and construction sites where workers may encounter discarded needles and trash contaminated with potentially infectious materials.

This fact sheet describes what employers need to know about hazards associated with homelessness and what Oregon OSHA rules they must follow to protect their employees.

Key hazards

Bloodborne pathogens and other potentially infectious materials

Bloodborne pathogens are microorganisms that can cause serious illness or death when transmitted through blood and some body fluids. The most common illnesses caused by bloodborne pathogens are hepatitis B (HBV), hepatitis C (HCV), and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS. Even small droplets of blood can contain pathogens that could harm a worker. Other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) include human body fluids and human tissue other than intact skin.



Bloodborne pathogens and OPIM are hazards associated with living on the street, but they also pose hazards for workers. When they are working in public places, workers should always be aware of their risk of exposure to these hazards.

Employers must determine if their employees could be exposed to blood or OPIM. If exposures are possible, employers must identify the employees who could be exposed and the circumstances in which those exposures are possible. Employers must follow the requirements in [Bloodborne pathogens \(1910.1030\)](#) to ensure their employees are protected.

Sources of bloodborne pathogens and OPIM include:

- Waste receptacles used by the public, which may contain needles
- Hidden needles discovered during routine cleaning
- Medical events involving blood and other human body fluids



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- Laundry that has been contaminated with blood or OPIM, or that may contain needles

Required training: Employees who could be exposed to bloodborne pathogens or OPIM must receive bloodborne pathogen training when they are first hired. The training must be conducted during working hours and at no cost to the employee. Training must be repeated at least once a year. Keep training records, containing the training date, training content, name and qualification of the trainer, and the name and job title of the trainee, for three years. See *Bloodborne pathogens, 1910.1030(g)(2)*, for more information about training requirements.

Human waste

Human waste – feces and urine – is not a bloodborne pathogen unless it contains human blood. However, human waste is a potential source for other viral and bacterial diseases, and also a serious health hazard if it contaminates drinking water. Workers should take proper precautions when cleaning up human waste:

- Put on disposable gloves.
- Solid waste: Scoop up solid waste using a disposable scoop; deposit the scoop and waste in a plastic garbage bag.
- Liquid waste: Pour absorbent material, such as kitty litter, onto liquid waste, or use paper towels to soak up the liquid; use a disposable scoop to put the material in a plastic garbage bag. Pour 10 percent bleach solution onto all contaminated areas of the surface. Let the bleach solution remain on the contaminated area for 20 minutes, then wipe up the remaining bleach solution.
- Disinfect all nondisposable cleaning materials, such as mops and scrub brushes, with 10 percent bleach solution and let them air dry.
- Remove disposable gloves and place in a plastic garbage bag with other soiled cleaning materials.

- Securely tie the plastic garbage bag and discard in a regular waste bin.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds.

Needles and other sharps

Workers should know how to handle and dispose of needles and other sharps they find in trash receptacles, parking lots, public restrooms, and on sidewalks. Improper disposal raises the risk of exposures to other workers and the public. Take proper precautions when handling needles and other sharps:



Sharps disposal **incorrect** (above): Container is not sealed.

Sharps disposal **correct** (below): Container is sealed and properly labeled.





- Use tongs, pliers, or a “trash grabber” to pick up sharps.
- Drop sharps in a puncture-resistant leak-proof container.
- Close and seal the container.
- Write “SHARPS. DO NOT RECYCLE” on the outside of the container.
- Dispose of the container properly. It is against the law to throw sharps in the garbage, even if they are in a secure plastic container. Drop the container in a sharps box or take it to a hazardous waste facility.

Aggressive behavior

Employers should have a [violence prevention program](#) that includes information on how their employees can recognize situations involving homeless people who may become hostile. Employers should also provide violence prevention training to all employees so they know how to respond to such situations in ways that minimize their risk of injury.

What workers may be affected?

Any time that workers interact with the public or work in public places there is a potential for

exposure to infectious materials and other hazards associated with homelessness. Workers who may be affected include:

- Construction workers
- Janitors
- Law enforcement and security officers
- Restaurant workers
- Teachers
- Transit workers
- Workers at volunteer organizations

What personal protective equipment is required?

Employers must determine if their workplaces have hazards that cannot be eliminated or controlled without personal protective equipment (PPE). If there are such hazards, employers must:

- Select the PPE that protects their employees from the hazards
- Communicate their selection decisions to each affected employee
- Ensure the PPE fits each employee
- Require employees to use the PPE when they are exposed to the hazards

Examples of PPE that workers might need for cleaning up hazards associated with homelessness include:

- Disposable N95 respirator
- Protective eyewear
- Hypoallergenic disposable gloves

If employees could be exposed to bloodborne pathogens or OPIM, employers also must provide (at no cost) PPE that does not permit blood or OPIM to pass through to or reach the employee’s clothes, skin, eyes, mouth, or other mucous membranes.

The hazard assessment must be certified.

Employers must prepare a document stating they have completed the hazard assessment. The document must include:

- A heading stating the document is a “certification” of the hazard assessment
- The name of the workplace evaluated
- The name of the person certifying the hazard assessment was completed
- The date of the hazard assessment

See *Personal protective equipment*, [437-002-0134\(1\)](#) and *Bloodborne pathogens*, [1910.1030\(d\)\(3\)](#) for more



information about PPE requirements.

What first aid supplies are required?

First aid is emergency care provided for injuries or sudden illnesses before emergency medical treatment is available.

Employers must provide first-aid supplies that are readily available to employees based on the types of injuries that could occur. First-aid supplies must be stored in containers that protect the contents from damage. The container must be clearly marked and must not be locked. See [437-002-0161](#), *First aid*, for more information.

Employers are also required to provide appropriate PPE for employees who are expected to give first aid and have exposure to blood or other potentially infectious materials while using first-aid supplies. See the requirements in *Bloodborne pathogens*, [1910.1030\(d\)\(3\)](#) and [1910.1030\(f\)\(3\)](#) for more information.

