

What employers need to know about hazards associated with homelessness



Oregon has one of the highest rates of people experiencing homelessness in the country, with about 60 percent living in unsheltered locations. This extends beyond unhoused camps and designated shelters to streets, sidewalks, businesses, abandoned buildings, parks, school playgrounds, vacant lots, and construction sites. While working at or near many of these places, workers may encounter discarded needles and trash contaminated with potentially infectious materials.

Employers must follow certain Oregon OSHA rules to protect their employees from these hazards.

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.

Workers in public places 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. To ensure their employees are protected, employers must follow the requirements in the bloodborne pathogens rule ([1910.1030](#)).

Sources of bloodborne pathogens and OPIM include:

- Waste receptacles used by the public, which may contain needles
- Needles discovered during routine cleaning
- Medical events involving blood and other human body fluids
- 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 – with the training date, training content,

name and qualification of the trainer, and the name and job title of the trainee – for three years.

More information about training requirements: bloodborne pathogens [1910.1030\(g\)\(2\)](#).

Human waste

Human feces and urine are not categorized as bloodborne pathogens unless they contain human blood. However, human waste is a potential source for other viral and bacterial diseases, and is a serious health hazard if it contaminates drinking water. Workers should take these precautions when cleaning up human feces and urine:

- Put on disposable gloves.
- Use a disposable scoop for picking up solid waste; deposit the scoop and waste in a plastic garbage bag.
- To soak up liquid waste, pour on absorbent material such as kitty litter or use paper towels. Use a disposable scoop to transfer the materials to a plastic garbage bag. Then pour 10 percent bleach solution or enzymatic cleaning solution onto any area that was contaminated. Let the solution remain on the contaminated area for a minimum of 20 minutes, then wipe up the remaining solution with towels to then place in a plastic garbage bag as well.
- 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(s) and discard in a dumpster or other designated trash bin.
- Wash your hands with soap and hot running water for at least 20 seconds.

Needles and other sharps

Workers should know how to handle and dispose of needles and other sharps commonly found in trash receptacles, parking lots, public restrooms, sidewalks, and elsewhere. Improper disposal raises the risk of exposures to other workers and the public. Needles and other sharps should go directly into designated containers.



Sharps disposal containers must be sealable and properly labeled.



Workers should take these precautions when encountering needles and other sharps:

- 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’re 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 unhoused people who may become hostile. Employers should also provide violence prevention training to all employees detailing how to respond to threats in ways that minimize their risk of injury.

Who is affected and what PPE and first-aid supplies are required?

What workers are likely to 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 the unhoused. Workers who may be affected include:

- Construction workers
- Janitors
- Law enforcement and security officers
- Restaurant workers
- Teachers
- Transit workers
- Health care workers
- Grocery, retail workers
- Workers at volunteer organizations
- Parks and recreation staff

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 the unhoused 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
- The date(s) the hazard assessment was completed

More rule information: personal protective equipment, [437-002-0134\(1\)](#), and bloodborne pathogens, [1910.1030\(d\)\(3\)](#).





damage. The container must be clearly marked and must not be locked.

More rule information: first aid, [437-002-0161](https://www.oregon.gov/OSHA/OSHA/Pages/437-002-0161.aspx).

Employers are also required to provide appropriate PPE for employees who are expected to give first aid and may be exposed to blood or other potentially infectious materials while using first-aid supplies.

More rule specifications: bloodborne pathogens, [1910.1030\(d\)\(3\)](https://www.oregon.gov/OSHA/OSHA/Pages/1910.1030(d)(3).aspx) and [1910.1030\(f\)\(3\)](https://www.oregon.gov/OSHA/OSHA/Pages/1910.1030(f)(3).aspx).

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



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