

OSHA FactSheet

Health and Safety Recommendations for Workers Who Handle Human Remains

Employers and workers face a variety of health hazards when handling, or working near, human remains. Workers directly involved in recovery or other efforts that require the handling of human remains are susceptible to bloodborne viruses such as hepatitis and HIV, and bacteria that cause diarrheal diseases, such as shigella and salmonella.

General Precautions

The following precautionary measures can help employers and employees remain safe and healthy while handling human remains.

Personal Protective Equipment

- **Hand Protection.** When handling potentially infectious materials, use appropriate barrier protection including latex and nitrile gloves (powder-free latex gloves with reduced latex protein content can help avoid reaction to latex allergies). These gloves can be worn under heavy-duty gloves which will, in turn, protect the wearer from cuts, puncture wounds, or other injuries that break the skin (caused by sharp environmental debris or bone fragments). A combination of a cut-proof inner layer glove and a latex or similar outer layer is preferable.
- **Foot Protection.** Footwear should similarly protect against sharp debris.
- **Eye and Face Protection.** To protect your face from splashes of body fluids and fecal material, use a plastic face shield or a combination of eye protection (indirectly vented safety goggles are a good choice if available; safety glasses will only provide limited protection) and a surgical mask.

Hygiene

- Maintain hand hygiene to prevent transmission of diarrheal and other diseases from fecal materials on your hands. Wash your hands with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand cleaner immediately after you remove your gloves.

- Give prompt care to any wounds sustained during work with human remains, including immediate cleansing with soap and clean water. Workers should also be vaccinated against hepatitis B, and get a tetanus booster if indicated.
- Never wear PPE and underlying clothing if it is damaged or penetrated by body fluids.
- Ensure disinfection of vehicles and equipment.

Ergonomic Considerations

- Lifting or moving heavy objects, particularly when done repetitively, can result in injuries to the workers involved. Human remains that have been in water for some time are likely to be even heavier than normal. Having more than one person involved in lifting the human remains will help to reduce the potential for injury. Following appropriate lifting techniques will also help to protect people, as will the use of mechanical lifts or other devices when available.

Myths

- There is no direct risk of contagion or infectious disease from being near human remains for those who are not directly involved in recovery or other efforts that require handling the remains.
- Viruses associated with human remains (e.g., hepatitis B and C, HIV, various bacteria, etc.) do not pose a risk to someone walking nearby, nor do they cause significant environmental contamination.

- The smell of human decay is unpleasant; however, it does not create a public health hazard.

Additional Information

- For more information on this, and other health-

related issues affecting workers, visit OSHA's Web site at www.osha.gov. More detailed guidance addressing this topic can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Website at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: (877) 889-5627.

For more complete information:



U.S. Department of Labor

www.osha.gov

(800) 321-OSHA

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