



OSHA Guidance on Ebola in the Workplace

OSHA has just released guidelines on protecting workers from Ebola in the workplace. Noting that employers are responsible for protecting workers from exposure to Ebola and chemicals used for cleaning and disinfecting, OSHA's guidelines address cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, areas, and or materials possibly contaminated from blood, urine, feces, vomit, and other bodily fluids that may contain Ebola. In addition, OSHA's guidelines address the proper waste disposal of potentially contaminated objects. (See OSHA's [Fact Sheet: Cleaning and Decontamination of Ebola on Surfaces](#).)

To ensure protection for workers, employers must follow the applicable OSHA standards and ensure they have proper policies and procedures in place. Employers need to provide adequate training to ensure employees understand their rights and are adequately prepared to handle potentially infectious materials.

OSHA tasks employers with ensuring workers use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, gowns, goggles, and facemasks, that will protect against Ebola and other hazards. In instances where workers may be exposed to bio-aerosols suspected to contain Ebola, they must wear additional respiratory protection. OSHA mandates this respiratory protection be, at a minimum, a NIOSH-approved fit-tested N95 respirator. Employers also need to ensure that they have a PPE policy in place and that workers are trained on how to select and use proper PPE.

OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens standard also covers workers who may be exposed to Ebola. As such, it is necessary to have a bloodborne pathogen policy in place and training on that policy. Employers must also comply with OSHA's Hazard Communication standards when workers are using certain chemicals for cleaning and decontamination. Of course, if a specific OSHA standard does not apply, OSHA will rely on the General Duty Clause to ensure that employers are furnishing a workplace free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm to workers.

— [Jane H. Heidingsfelder](#)

Remember that these legal principles may change and vary widely in their application to specific factual circumstances. You should consult with counsel about your individual circumstances. For further information regarding these issues, contact:

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