

Advice for patients following a human bite, needlestick injury, or suspected sexual exposure to blood-borne viruses

Who is this advice for?

This advice applies to patients attending the Emergency Department following an injury with the potential to transmit viral infections. This includes bite wounds, and wounds sustained by non-biting contact with teeth, such as wounds to the hand after punching another person in the mouth. It also includes injuries from injection needles and from unprotected sexual exposure.

What was my assessment?

Your assessment today included how and when you were injured or exposed, and if you have any significant medical problems. If there is a wound, it will have been examined to check how deep it is and whether it was contaminated with foreign material. You may have had an x-ray to see if there were any foreign bodies inside the wound.

This assessment helped the doctor or nurse decide what treatment was needed.

How will you treat my wound?

Bites

If the bite did not break the skin then you do not need further treatment. There may be some bruising of the skin, but you should have no long-term problems.

Small wounds may not need to be closed.

Sometimes we close fresh wounds using stitches or adhesive strips, but we leave most bites open and covered with a dressing for 1-3 days. If the doctor or nurse thinks they might need to close the wound when the dressing is changed, you will be given an appointment to come back to the Emergency Department Review Clinic, where a senior doctor will check if the wound needs to be closed or left open.

Patients with very complex wounds may be referred to the Plastic Surgery doctors at Bradford Royal Infirmary.

Needlestick injury

If your injury was from a needle, it should be cleaned thoroughly with soap and water and bleeding encouraged but without squeezing it. A small dressing is sometimes needed.

Sexual exposure

If you have an injury from non-consensual sex (rape), then the doctor will not usually examine your genitals unless they suspect you have a serious injury requiring an operation.

The examination will normally be done at the specialist Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) so you don't need to be examined twice.

What about antibiotics?

Anyone who has a human bite that has broken the skin should be treated with a 7 day course of antibiotics to prevent infection. If the bite is already over 72 hours old and is not infected then antibiotics are not usually necessary.

If the wound is already infected then a swab may have been taken before cleaning it.

Needlestick injuries and sexual exposure do not normally need antibiotics from the Emergency Department

Which antibiotics?

If you ARE NOT allergic to penicillin then we will give you coamoxiclav.

If you ARE allergic to penicillin then we will give you both clarithromycin and metronidazole. If you are allergic to either of these antibiotics then please let the doctor or nurse know and we will look at alternatives.

Tetanus

Tetanus is a very serious disease caused by a bacterium called *Clostridium tetani*. The bacteria and its spores are usually found in soil and manure. It thrives in dead tissue and deep wounds. It is rare to get tetanus from a human bite, but you may be offered the tetanus vaccine if you are not fully immunized. In general, adults should have a booster every 10 years anyway.

Blood-borne viruses

It is possible to catch hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV from exposure to blood and many bodily fluids. This is rare with bites and needlestick injuries, even from infected people. HIV does not survive long when exposed to the air, so needlestick injuries from discarded syringes are not high risk.

Many people who have HIV and are on long-term treatment may have not virus that can be detected in their blood, which means you cannot catch HIV from them.

Depending on the depth and size of a bite wound, and whether the person who bit you or that you had sex with is known or available, you may be offered blood tests. These would need to be repeated at your GP surgery. **Take this advice leaflet to your GP practice so they can arrange tests as follows on the next page:**

Time	Hepatitis B	Hepatitis C	HIV
At time of incident if both people are known*	HBsAg	Ab	Ag/Ab combined test
6 weeks later	HBsAg	PCR	Ag/Ab combined test
3 months later	HBsAg	Ab (add PCR if either person high risk of HCV)	Ag/Ab combined test
6 months later	HBsAg	Ab	Ag/Ab combined test (only if the person was not tested at 3 months)
*If only one person is known, send 10 ml clotted blood for storage.			

The doctor will assess your risk of exposure to these viruses based on how and when you were exposed. Some types of exposure carry no risk, while others are riskier. The table the doctor will refer to can be found online here:

If the doctor is concerned that there is a significant risk that you might be contaminated with one of these viruses then they may recommend a vaccine against hepatitis B, and tablets to prevent HIV infection. **If you are given treatment to prevent HIV then you must contact a sexual health clinic to arrange further tests and treatment.**

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C infection, but it is rare in this area. There is treatment available if you do catch hepatitis C.

Follow up

Most patients with simple bites and needlestick injuries can be discharged without hospital follow-up.

If you have had blood tests in the Emergency Department, and you are not advised to see a sexual health clinic, then please make appointments to have blood tests at your GP surgery. It will be helpful to them if you take this advice sheet with you because it helps them plan your appointments.

If you have been asked to make a Review Clinic appointment, please go to the reception desk where you will be given the appointment date and time.

If you have been advised to attend the Practice Nurse at your GP surgery for dressings, please telephone your surgery as soon as possible to arrange an appointment.

If you have suffered a sexual assault or rape, you will be offered follow up at a SARC, even if you do not want to report the assault to the police. We can arrange this, or you can call them yourself. If you want to call the police and would like support with this, please tell someone.

For more information contact:

- Emergency Department 01535 294481
- Emergency Department appointments 01535 294482
- NHS 111 111, or 111.nhs.uk
- The NHS website www.nhs.uk
- Sexual health clinics:
 - <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-sexual-health-clinic/>
 - www.nhs.uk, search “sexual health clinic” and enter your postcode.
 - Inform them that you have been started on an HIVPEP-pack, and they will arrange to follow you up.
- IDAS sexual violence charity
 - sexualviolence.idas.org.uk
 - 03000 110110
- Sexual Assault Referral Centre:
 - The Hazlehurst Centre, Morley, Leeds
 - 0330 223 3617 (day), 0330 223 0099 (night)
- Terence Higgins Trust online risk tool www.tht.org/pep-tool

Are you a victim of Domestic Violence? For confidential advice, contact:

Bradford	0808 2800 999	https://www.stayingput.uk.net/contact
North Yorkshire	03000 110 110	https://www.idas.org.uk/
Lancashire	0300 323 0085	https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/domestic-abuse/

Advice adapted from:

- NICE CKS published August 2021
<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/bites-human-animal/management/managing-a-human-bite/>
- BASHH HIV PEP guideline
<https://www.bashhguidelines.org/media/1308/pep-2021.pdf>

If you require this leaflet in other languages or formats please telephone the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01535 294019

Author: Emergency Department
Date of publication: November 2018
Date revised: July 2022
Date of review: July 2025

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