Universal Precautions:
Guidelines for Handling Body Fluids

(Note: Guidelines included here apply to all body fluids regardless of the health condition of the injured or ill person. All body fluids, except sweat, may contain potentially infectious disease and should be handled following the principle of 'standard' or 'universal' precautions.)

Please see Section D, Chapter 1 for general guidelines for prevention and control of communicable diseases in schools.

Procedures for handling spills of body fluids (vomitus, feces, urine, and blood) are needed in schools. Staff with documented training in bloodborne pathogens should handle the clean-up of spills. Three things must be present for an infection to occur: a source, susceptibility, and a mode of transmission. Through the implementation of a set of standard or universal precautions, the risk or transmission is lowered. It is important for all blood and body fluid spills to be regarded as if they are known to be infectious since the health status of an individual may be unknown. By following a few simple steps, and using any recommended personal protective equipment, clean-up can be an effective and safe procedure.

1. Disposable gloves should be worn when cleaning up blood, feces, vomitus, urine, or any potentially contaminated body fluid. This is to be done in addition to, not as a substitute for, hand washing. Using non-latex gloves decreases the possibility of becoming latex-sensitive and protects those who are.
2. Hands should be washed thoroughly as soon as it is practical following exposure to body fluids such as blood, vomitus, feces, urine, saliva, nasal or other respiratory secretions. Proper hand washing requires the use of soap and vigorous washing under a stream of running water for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to lather the backs of hands, between fingers, and under the nails (CDC, 2024).
3. Cleaning up body fluids is an essential step and may be done with paper towels. Drying or sanitary absorbing agents may be used with large volumes of body fluids (e.g., vomitus). These products are not, however, disinfectants. All disposable clean-up materials should be placed in a sealed plastic bag for discarding. Non-disposable items such as dustpans and brooms should be cleaned with a disinfectant. For more information on appropriate disinfectants, see the U.S. Department of Labor's OSHA site, Selected EPA-registered Disinfectants.
4. Only EPA-labeled cleaning products should be used. Districts should select only a few products to lessen the possibility of confusing the different types of cleaners available. If EPA-approved products are not available, a solution using bleach can be used. It must be stored and labeled correctly and kept out of student reach. The CDC provides a recipe for this purpose.
5. Clothing or throw-rugs contaminated with body fluids should be laundered.

Individuals who have no symptoms of illness could be at various stages of infection: incubating disease, mildly infected without symptoms, or chronic carriers of certain infectious agents including the AIDS and hepatitis viruses. Because simple precautions are not always carried out, transmission of communicable diseases is more likely to occur from contact with infected body fluids of unrecognized carriers than from contact with fluids from recognized individuals.

For guidance on handling possible contamination for specific infectious agents, see https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/.
For information on MRSA see https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/about/index.html

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, February 16). *Clean Hands* https://www.cdc.gov/clean-hands/about/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Prevention and Control Spread of Infections.* https://www.cdc.gov/children-and-school-preparedness/infection-prevention/actions.html

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U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.). *Bloodborne pathogens and needlestick prevention.* Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Retrieved May 17, 2021. from https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/bloodbornepathogens/worker_protections.html.