Frequently Asked Questions About the Possible Exposure to Bloodborne Viruses

How could I have been exposed to Hepatitis B (HBV), Hepatitis C (HCV), or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in a medical clinic?

When healthcare professionals do not follow proper infection control procedures while performing injections or other similar procedures that involve breaking the skin, patients can be at risk to acquire these diseases. Proper infection control techniques include thorough disinfection and sterilization of instruments, proper disposal of sharp objects, proper use of single dose and multi-dose medication vials, and never reusing items such as needles and syringes between patients.

Who is the doctor or clinic that is under investigation?

The medical practice of Dr. Allen Thomashefsky.

How did this happen?

In February 2015 the SBCPHD began investigating a case of Hepatitis C infection which may have been acquired from an injection at the medical practice of Allen Thomashefsky, M.D. During the investigation, we identified unsafe infection control practices which may have exposed patients to the blood of other clinic patients. Out of caution, SBCPHD is contacting individuals who have been a patient at Dr. Thomashefsky’s medical practice so that they can take the appropriate steps to get blood tests for Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B, and HIV, which can all be spread from unsafe infection control procedures.

What else could I have been exposed to?

Based upon the investigation, the SBCPHD is most concerned about Hepatitis C. Because Hepatitis B or HIV can be spread in the same manner as Hepatitis C, we recommend that you get tested for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV.

What are you doing about it?
Actions are being taken to protect health and safety for the patients of the clinic and to prevent future similar situations. The SBCPHD has closed this medical clinic until such time that practices can be demonstrated to be safe.

**What’s going to happen to the doctor? Is he still going to be able to practice medicine?**

The SBCPHD has closed this medical clinic until such time that practices can be demonstrated to be safe. The results of the investigation will dictate next steps regarding Dr. Thomashefsky’s medical practice. We will take action to assure the public is safe.

**Who needs to get tested?**

Patients who had injection procedures performed at the medical clinic between June 2014 and March 2015 need to be tested. These patients were sent notification letters the first week in April. Patients who had injection procedures performed at the medical clinic prior to June of 2014 back to 2007 need to be tested. These patients will receive letters in the later weeks of April.

**Why should I get tested?**

The SBCPHD is committed to protecting the public’s health and out of caution recommends that anyone who received an injection at the identified medical practice be tested. People infected with Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B, and HIV may not have symptoms for many years, so it is important to get tested even if you do not have symptoms or feel ill. Identifying a viral infection allows a person to get timely and appropriate medical care.

**What tests should I get?**

SBCPHD recommends that you get a blood test for Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B, and HIV, which can all be spread from unsafe infection control procedures. While no cases of Hepatitis B or HIV have been identified, these viruses can be spread in the same manner as Hepatitis C.

**What if I was seen at the clinic but did not get an injection?**

Only patients who received an injection need to be concerned about getting exposed to a viral infection. If you received a consultation, but no injection procedures, no tests are recommended.

**What procedures should I be worried about?**

Any procedure, in which skin was broken, such as an injection, would potentially place a person at risk for exposure to a blood borne virus.

**Can I go to my own health care provider?**
Unless you have already received a letter with the laboratory requisition form included, we request that you print the laboratory requisition form available [here](#) and present it to your health care provider. If you were a patient of Dr. Thomshefsky in previous years, you may be receiving a notification letter from us along with a laboratory requisition form.

**How long will it take to get results? How will I be notified of laboratory blood test results?**

Generally, results are available in approximately 2 weeks. The physician ordering your tests will provide you with your results.

**Do I need to practice safe sex while waiting for my results?**

Until test results are available, we do not know the risk. If you are concerned at all, it is best to take precautions.

**Who is going to pay for the tests?**

For patients who may have been exposed between June 2014 and March 2015 - SBCPHD has made special arrangements to provide free, confidential testing at Pacific Diagnostic Laboratories (PDL). In order for the tests to be performed, it is important to bring your notification letter to the testing site.

For patients who may have been exposed prior to June of 2014 – Testing will be covered under health care insurance through your health care provider. If you do not have a provider or means to cover the costs of testing, you may come to one of the Public Health Department Health Care Centers (click [here](#) for locations) and register as a patient with us. You will be charged on an ability to pay basis. In order for the tests to be performed, it is important to bring a laboratory requisition form to your health care provider.

**What happens if I test positive for HBV, HCV, or HIV?**

If you are a patient exposed between June 2014 and March 2015 with positive test results, you will be contacted by a Santa Barbara County Public Health Nurse for an interview and an additional blood test. You will be provided with information specific to the disease for which you test positive and will be referred to your private physician for further evaluation.

If you are a patient exposed prior to June of 2014 with positive results, you should expect to be notified by the physician ordering your blood tests. Your physician can provide you with further information and recommendations for additional testing and treatment.

**Should my family members get tested, too, even though they did not have a procedure at the practice of concern?**
No, at this time, only persons who had injection procedures at Dr. Thomashefsky’s medical office are considered to be at risk of exposure to the bloodborne viruses and are recommended to obtain testing. Testing of family members may be advised if one of your tests is positive. Those recommendations will be made at the appropriate time.

**What else is the health department doing to ensure this doesn't happen again?**

The health department has closed Dr. Thomashefsky’s medical clinic until such time that practices can be demonstrated to be safe. We have recommended local experts in infection control practices to provide guidance and oversight to the healthcare professionals at the clinic. We are actively investigating this situation to determine if diseases were transmitted and how. Once this is better understood, the health department can take steps to ensure that this doesn't occur again.

**Is every patient of the medical office being notified?**

The Santa Barbara County Department of Public Health is working to identify all individuals who may have been exposed and assure all obtain laboratory testing. Patients who had an injection procedure in the past seven years are being contacted. Patients who may have been exposed between June of 2014 and March of 2015 will be notified at the beginning of April. Individuals who may have been exposed prior to June of 2014 will be notified later in the month of April.

**When was the problem identified?**

In February 2015 the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department began investigating a case of Hepatitis C infection in a patient of a local medical practice. The infection control problem in the clinic was identified in March 2015 following a public health site investigation to Dr. Thomashefsky’s medical clinic.

**Are any patients known to have been infected?**

In February 2015 the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department began investigating a case of Hepatitis C infection which may have been acquired from an injection at Dr. Thomashefsky’s clinic. We are investigating to determine if additional patients may have been infected due to exposures at the medical clinic. We hope that our investigation will determine if the improper practices led to infection of patients. Right now, we just want to inform persons that may have been at risk of exposure and provide testing, so they know their infection status.

**Is the problem still going on?**

No, once the improper practices were identified, Dr. Thomaskefsky’s medical clinic ceased patient care in Santa Barbara County.

**Who is performing the public health investigation?**
The public health investigation is being conducted by the Santa Barbara Public Health Department with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the California Department of Public Health.

**When will the investigation be complete?**

It is not possible to say how long the investigation will take. Investigations of this nature require extensive laboratory testing and follow up.

**I was a patient there many years ago. Should I be tested, even though I did not receive a notification?**

We do not know how long these improper practices have been occurring, so we recommend that all patients who had injections at this clinic be tested for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV. Notification letters have been sent to patients who visited the clinic for injections from around the time that the HCV case may have been infected, to the last day the clinic was open in March of 2015. We are now reviewing all clinic records to obtain contact information for patients seen in the past, so that letters to all remaining patients may be sent. This review and mailing may take several weeks, and it is possible that the clinic may not have kept all past records so that some names and addresses may be missing. If you had an injection at Dr. Thomashefsky's clinic and have not received a letter then please discuss this recommendation with your physician.

**Is it too late to be tested if I was a patient many years ago?**

People infected with Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B, and HIV may not have symptoms for many years, so it is important to get tested even if you do not have symptoms or do not feel ill. Even if you have been tested in the past, it is important to get tested at this time. The notification letter includes a list of recommended laboratory tests that may be given to your healthcare provider.

**How soon can I be tested?**

You may be tested right away. The notification letters sent include all the recommended laboratory tests for each patient depending on the date of your last injection at the clinic. If you did not receive a notification letter and know that you received injections at the offices of Dr. Thomashefsky, please take a copy of the laboratory requisition form available on this website with you to your health care provider.

**Does this happen very often in other medical offices?**

No, most healthcare professionals practice proper infection control procedures.

**Has HBV, HCV, or HIV transmission ever occurred before in a medical clinic setting?**

Very rarely, HIV, HCV and HBV have been known to be transmitted in the medical clinic setting.
What do healthcare professionals do to protect their patients from being exposed to these bloodborne viruses?

Healthcare professionals are trained to utilize what is known as Standard/Universal Precautions to protect themselves and their patients. Standard/Universal Precautions require that the blood and other body fluids of all patients be handled as if they contain viruses or other micro-organisms in the blood that can cause human disease. Appropriate use of hand washing, protective barriers such as gloves, injection safety including proper medication preparation and administration, and care in the use and disposal of needles and other sharp instruments are also important components of observing Standard/Universal Precautions.

Where can I call if I have more questions?

Please visit the Santa Barbara County website at www.sbcphd.org or call the Santa Barbara County Information line at: 805-681-4373.