Risk of infection with blood borne viruses:
Exposure to blood borne viruses in the clinical setting requires both an injury (i.e. percutaneous injury from a needle or other sharp object, a splash of blood or other body fluid onto a mucous membrane or non-intact skin, or a human bite that breaks the skin) and contact with blood or body fluid capable of transmitting a blood borne virus. The risk of infection can be greatly reduced by putting in place proper infection control practices. In the event of potential exposure, students must seek immediate medical attention and report the incident at the earliest opportunity to their clinical supervisor or Program Director.

Symptoms of blood borne virus infection:
Hepatitis B and C – No symptoms OR fatigue, loss of appetite, abdominal discomfort, jaundice, change in colour of urine and stool, rash, sore joints; occurring within six weeks to six months after the exposure.
HIV – No symptoms OR flu-like symptoms occurring within weeks of exposure; unexplained weight loss, chronic diarrhea, swollen lymph nodes, fever, fatigue or opportunistic infections.

Risk of transmitting blood borne viruses:
Students who perform or assist in performing exposure-prone procedures risk transmitting blood borne viruses to their patients. Exposure-prone procedures include invasive procedures where there is the potential for direct contact between the skin (usually a hand finger or thumb) of the student and sharp instruments, needle tips, or sharp tissues (spicules of bone or teeth) in body cavities, wounds, or in poorly visualized, confined anatomical sites.

Hepatitis B immunization and serology:
Students in health professional programs must be protected with a series of Hepatitis B vaccinations unless they are known to have chronic Hepatitis B infection or are immune due to naturally acquired infection. Post-immunization serologic testing for immunity is required for health care workers and child care workers. For details click on Hepatitis B Immunization & Serology Information.

Pre-placement testing and reporting:
Postgraduate Medicine students must comply with the CPSO Blood Borne Viruses Policy and self-report positive serology to the CPSO and their Assistant Dean (reference: CPSO Blood Borne Viruses Policy).
Midwifery, Physician Assistant and Undergraduate Medicine students may perform or assist in performing exposure-prone procedures during their training, and are therefore obligated to know their status with respect to blood borne viruses (reference: COFM Blood Borne Viruses Policy). Only the dates of tests are required by the Health Screening Office, verified by a nurse or physician after reviewing the reports with the student. Students in these programs with positive serology must self-report their status to the Assistant Dean of their program.
- Test for HBsAg (Hepatitis B surface antigen) must be conducted on or after the time of assessment for Hepatitis B immunity (anti-HBs), or within six months prior to program start if the primary Hepatitis B vaccination series is still in process (wait until at least 28 days after a Hepatitis B vaccine to avoid the possibility of a false positive result). Note HBsAg (Hepatitis B surface antigen) is a different test than anti-HBs (Hepatitis B surface antibody); HBsAg tests for chronic infection and anti-HBs tests for immunity.
- Tests for Hepatitis C Ab and HIV Ab are required within six months prior to program start and are valid for four years.

Testing and/or reporting for blood borne viruses is not required for students in other health professional programs prior to their program start.

Click on the links below for more information:
Public Health Ontario Routine Practices Fact Sheet
OHA/OMA Blood Borne Diseases Surveillance Protocol for Ontario Hospitals
Hepatitis B: Public Health Agency of Canada Hepatitis B Get the Facts
Hepatitis C: Public Health Agency of Canada Hepatitis C
HIV/AIDS: Government of Canada HIV and AIDS

Health Screening Office, MDCL 3514, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton ON L8S 4K1, (905) 525-9140 ext 22249, fax 905-528-4348