

Needlestick/Sharps Safety and Prevention

**PROTECTING
YOURSELF
FROM
NEEDLESTICK
INJURIES**

PREVENTING SHARPS INJURIES

While exposure to bloodborne pathogens presents a deadly hazard, these risks are very preventable. Over 80% of sharps injuries can be prevented with the use of safety engineered devices, which, in conjunction with worker training and work practice controls, can reduce injuries by over 90%.

An effective sharps injury prevention program includes:

- An assessment of hazards using the institution's own, or the University of Virginia EPINet™ data.
- The implementation of safety engineered devices with priority on vascular access and blood drawing devices. Next for consideration are hypodermic devices, then blades, lancets, and lastly sutures.
- A needlestick/sharps injury log containing the situation and type of device involved in the incident, including make, model, and manufacturer.
- A training program reviewed regularly by the Joint Health & Safety Committee (JHSC) to provide workers with information on the risks of bloodborne pathogens, and how to reduce these risks through safer products and practices. Workers should also be trained on post-exposure protocols.
- An exposure control plan that brings all of the above items together. The exposure control plan is to be created and revised annually with input from non-managerial staff and the JHSC.

R I S K S

Every year ONA members working in health care are exposed to deadly bloodborne pathogens as a result of incidents from medical sharps devices. There are more than 69,000 sharps incidents each year in this country. Although registered nurses sustain the majority of these injuries, doctors, lab technologists, housekeeping staff, maintenance workers, laundry workers and other health care workers also suffer needlestick and sharps injuries. These injuries are also a community health concern affecting waste disposal workers, education sector workers, municipal, penal/penitentiary workers, etc. Eliminating these preventable hazards is a legitimate concern for everyone at risk.

RISK OF INJURY

The highest risk for pathogen transmission is from hollow-bore, blood-filled needles. Specific features make some devices more dangerous:

- Hollow-bore needles
- Needle devices that must be taken apart or manipulated by the health care worker
- Devices that retain an exposed needle after use
- Needles that are attached to tubing

RISK OF DISEASE

Sharps injuries can expose workers to a number of bloodborne pathogens that can cause serious or fatal infections. The bloodborne pathogens that pose the greatest health risk are:

- Hepatitis B virus (HBV)
- Hepatitis C virus (HCV)
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

HBV vaccination has proved highly effective in preventing infection. It is recommended for all health care workers. However, no vaccine exists to prevent HCV or HIV infection. Some risk factors can increase the risk of HIV transmission.

WORK PRACTICES

Engineering controls eliminate hazards at the source and are the best and most effective approach to occupational health and safety. Safety engineered needles and medical sharps must be the primary source of eliminating and reducing sharps related injuries.

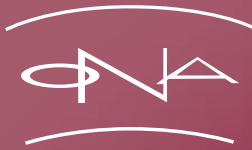
Safety engineered medical devices afford the worker superior protection because the safety features/technologies are designed and incorporated into the device.

If you sustain an injury:

- Wash the wound with soap and water
- Alert your supervisor
- Report immediately to employee health or emergency room (ER)
- Ensure that you follow up the incident with your family physician
- Get post-exposure prophylaxis within two hours of the exposure (if appropriate)
- Document the incident ie. in a sharps injury log
- Get follow-up testing and counselling
- File a workers' compensation report
- Notify your Joint Health & Safety Committee
- Notify your Bargaining Unit/Local/Labour Relations Officer

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO...

- Insist on safety-engineered devices in your workplace. Exercise your legal rights under the Occupational Health & Safety Act when necessary.
- Always activate the safety feature of any device you are using. Safety-engineered devices eliminate the unnecessary risk of recapping.
- Plan for the safe handling and disposal of sharps before using them.
- Promptly dispose of used sharps in appropriate sharps disposal containers.
- Tell your supervisor, employer, and Joint Health & Safety Committee about any needlestick/sharps hazards.
- Report all needlestick and sharps-related injuries promptly to ensure you receive appropriate care.
- Participate in training related to infection prevention.
- Get a hepatitis B vaccination.
- Exercise your legal rights to health & safety protection, including the right to refuse unsafe work where possible. Please refer to ONA's website for more information on your Right to Refuse Unsafe Work. www.ona.org



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