

Infection Prevention Control (IPC) Topic: Sharps Safety

Intro: Safe handling of needles and other sharp devices are important to prevent health care worker exposure to germs that live in the blood. Accidental sharp injuries in healthcare are highly preventable and it is important to understand the risk.¹

What is the risk? Germs from the blood reservoir, such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, can spread when blood from an infected person is on a sharp item. If that item causes a cut or break in the skin (e.g., an accidental needlestick), germs can spread to that person and cause a new infection.²

Highlights:

- ❑ Facts about needlestick injuries:
 - Which infections can be caused by needlestick injuries? Hepatitis B (HBV), Hepatitis C (HCV), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
 - Who is at risk? Nurses have the highest number of needlestick injuries. However, all healthcare workers who may come into contact with needles are at risk.³
 - When and How Do Injuries Occur?
 - Injuries most often occur after use and before disposal of a sharp device (40%), during use of a sharp device on a patient (41%), and during or after disposal (15%).³
 - ❑ What kinds of needles usually cause needlestick injuries?
 - Hypodermic needles, Blood collection needles, Suture needles, needles used in IV delivery systems.
 - ❑ Causes of needlestick injuries include:
 - Recapping needles
 - Failing to dispose of used needles properly in puncture-resistant sharps containers.
 - Over filled sharps containers
 - ❑ How do I protect myself from needlestick injuries?
 - Avoid recapping needles.
 - Do not remove needles from syringes by hand.
 - Promptly dispose of used needles in appropriate sharps disposal containers.
 - Avoid the use of needles where safe and effective alternatives are available.
 - Avoid over-filling sharps containers. Sharp containers should be filled to the fill line on the container.
 - Report all needlestick and sharps-related injuries promptly to ensure that you receive appropriate follow up care.
 - Participate in training related to infection prevention.
-

- Familiarize and practice **CDC - Stop Sticks - NORA** - a public health effort aimed to raise awareness about the risk of workplace exposure to bloodborne pathogens from needlesticks and other sharps-related injuries. ⁴
- Steps to take following a needlestick or sharps injury:⁵
 - Wash needlesticks and cuts with soap and water.
 - Report the incident to your supervisor and fill out exposure report sheet.
 - Evaluate exposure source for HBV, HCV, and HIV.
 - Assess if patient is willing to consent for disease testing if unknown status.
 - Immediately seek medical treatment, if indicated.

Summary: Needlestick injuries can lead to serious and/or fatal infections. Estimates show between 600,000 to 800,000 needlestick injuries occur each year⁶. We stop the spread of infection by identifying reservoirs where germs live and recognizing activities that can put us or our patients at risk for infection. We must always remember that germs can live in blood, so preventing sharps and needlestick injuries is an important step to minimize the risk of germ spread from the blood reservoir.

References:

1. <https://www.osha.gov/bloodborne-pathogens/quick-reference>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/pdf/projectfirstline/Healthcare-Germs-Body-Blood-508.pdf>
3. https://www.cdc.gov/sharpssafety/pdf/sharpsworkbook_2008.pdf
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/nora/councils/hcsa/stopsticks/default.html>
5. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2000-108/pdfs/2000-108.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSH PUB2000108>