

SUMMER 2015

Don't Get Stuck!

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Needlesticks and other sharps-related injuries which expose long-term care workers to bloodborne pathogens continue to be a significant workplace hazard. According to OSHA, there is an estimated 5.6 million workers (the population of Atlanta, GA) in the healthcare industry and related occupations and are at risk of occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens.

Bloodborne pathogens are pathogenic microorganisms that are present in human blood and can cause disease in humans.

Any worker handling sharp devices or equipment such as hypodermic needles, blood collection devices, or phlebotomy devices is at risk. In the long-term care environment, nursing staff are most frequently injured, and data shows that needlestick injuries occur most frequently in the resident's rooms.

What infections can be caused by needlestick injuries?

Needlestick injuries can expose workers to a number of blood-borne pathogens that can cause serious or fatal infections. The pathogens that pose the most serious health risks are:

- Hepatitis B virus (HBV)
- Hepatitis C virus (HCV)
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)—the virus that causes AIDS

HBV vaccination is recommended for all health care workers (unless they are immune because of previous exposure). HBV vaccine has proved highly effective in preventing infection in workers exposed to HBV. However, no vaccine exists to prevent HCV or HIV infection.

Who is at risk of needlestick injury?

Any worker who may come in contact with needles is at risk, including nursing staff, housekeeper and maintenance staff.



How common are needlestick injuries among health care workers?

Estimates indicate that 600,000 to 800,000 needlestick injuries occur each year. Unfortunately, about half of these injuries are not reported. Always report needlestick injuries to ensure that you receive appropriate follow up care.

What kinds of needles usually cause needlestick injuries?

- Hypodermic needles
- Blood collection needles
- Needles used and improperly disposed

Do certain work practices increase the risk of needlestick injury?

Yes. Past studies have shown that needlestick injuries are often associated with these activities:

- Recapping needles
- Failing to dispose of used needles properly in puncture-resistant sharps containers

How can I protect myself from needlestick injuries?

- Avoid the use of needles where safe and effective alternatives are available.
- Help your employer select and evaluate devices with safety features that reduce the risk of needlestick injury.
- Use devices with safety features provided by your employer.
- Avoid recapping needles.
- Plan for safe handling and disposal of needles before using them.
- Promptly dispose of used needles in appropriate sharps disposal containers.
- Report all needlestick and sharps-related injuries promptly to ensure that you receive appropriate follow-up care.
- Tell your employer about any needlestick hazards you observe.
- Participate in training related to infection prevention.
- Get a hepatitis B vaccination.

Editor's Note:

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In order to ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions and feedback to:

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So, stay safe with sharps and “Don’t Get Stuck!”

References: OSHA.gov, NIOSH.gov

