

Protect Yourself From Needlestick Injuries

What infections can be caused by needlestick injuries?

Needlestick injuries can expose workers to a number of bloodborne 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 workers (unless they are immune because of previous exposure) who's work activities may require them to come in contact with sharps, blood, and body fluids. HBV vaccine has proved highly effective in preventing infection in workers exposed to HBV. However, no vaccine exists to prevent HCV or HIV infection.

Preventing needlestick injuries is the best way to protect yourself and others from these infections.

Who is at risk of needlestick injury?

Any worker who may come in contact with needles is at risk, including nursing staff, lab workers, researchers, doctors, custodial staff and housekeepers.

How common are needlestick injuries?

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 your supervisor and the department of Human Resources. Fill out the "Employee Incident Report" form, and ensure you receive appropriate follow-up care.*** Form can be downloaded from:

<http://www.d.umn.edu/umdhr/WorkComp>

What kinds of needles usually cause needlestick injuries?

- Hypodermic needles
- Blood collection needles
- Suture needles
- Needles used in IV delivery systems

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
- Transferring a body fluid between containers
- Failing to dispose of used needles properly in puncture-resistant sharps containers

How can I protect others and myself from needlestick injuries?

- Avoid the use of needles where safe and effective alternatives are available.
- Select, evaluate and use devices with safety features that reduce the risk of needlestick injury.
- Avoid recapping needles.
- Plan for safe handling and disposal of needles before using them.
- Never dispose of sharps in the regular Trash
- Never leave needles unattended on workbench.
- 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.
- Inform both Environmental health and Safety Office and your supervisor about any needlestick hazards you observe in your workplace.
- Participate in training related to infection prevention. <http://www.d.umn.edu/ehso/biosafety>
- Get a hepatitis B vaccination.

For questions or comments call Environmental Health and Safety Office at 7273

Needlestick injuries can lead to serious or fatal infections. Employees who use or may be exposed to needles are at increased risk of needlestick injury. All workers who are at risk should take steps to protect themselves from this significant health hazard.