

TOOL BOX TALKS

Preventing Needle Sticks

Health care workers who use or may be exposed to needles are at increased risk of needlestick injury. But other workers can be exposed to needlestick also – custodians, law enforcement officers and trash disposal employees are also exposed. Such injuries can lead to serious or fatal infections with bloodborne pathogens such as hepatitis B and C virus, or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

WORKSAFE TIPS

Background

- Records indicate that 600,000 to 800,000 needlestick injuries occur annually [Henry and Campbell 1995; EPINet 1999].
- About half of these needlestick injuries go unreported.
- Records show that at an average hospital, workers incur approximately 30 needlestick injuries per 100 beds per year.
- Most reported needlestick injuries involve nursing staff; but laboratory staff, physicians, housekeepers, and other health care workers are also injured.
- Some of these injuries expose workers to bloodborne pathogens that can cause infection.
- The most important of these pathogens are HBV, HCV, and HIV. Infections with each of these pathogens are potentially life threatening—and preventable.
- The emotional impact of a needlestick injury can be severe and long lasting, even when a serious infection is not transmitted.

How do needlesticks occur?

- Needlesticks are called “percutaneous injuries.”
- Needlestick injuries are related to:
 - Recapping
 - Recapping is prohibited by OSHA.
 - Transferring body fluids between containers.
 - The user could be transferring a specimen to a vacuum container (vial) and miss.
 - Failing to dispose of used needles in puncture resistant containers.
 - Used needles are left in the work area.

BEST PRACTICES

- Whenever a needle or other sharp device is exposed, an injury could occur.
- Be alert – when handling a needle, be alert to the movements of the patient or coworkers – don’t get bumped while holding a needle.
- Your personal safety is essential – some workers place patient concerns above their personal safety.
- Approximately 38% of percutaneous injuries occur during use.
- Approximately 42% of percutaneous injuries occur after use and before disposal.
- Employees exposed to potential needlestick must be trained in exposure prevention and disposal methods.
- Employees exposed to bloodborne pathogens and needlesticks should be offered a Hepatitis B vaccination.
- Know sharps disposal methods.
- Employees must practice universal precautions: The assumption that all body fluids are potentially infected.
- Never dispose of sharps in regular trash.
- Dispose of sharps in approved sharps containers or containers that are puncture proof / leak proof containers.
- Never hand or pass a sharp to a co-worker.
- Use the two-finger method, or forceps, for picking up sharps.
- When searching between cushions or underneath furniture for a sharp, use a ruler or dowel rod, not the fingers or hands.
- Always wear exam gloves when handling sharps or potentially infected materials.
- Don’t use a needle if an alternative is available.

Work SAFE

Smart, Accident-Free Environments