

# Prevention Update



## Sharps and Needlestick Hazards Management

Injuries involving needles and syringes can happen at any stage of handling, **including usage, transfer, storage and disposal**. Injuries can also occur from contact with improperly discarded needles and other sharps.

To prevent needlestick injuries, it is **important** that employers and workers know the risks and work together to reduce and manage the risks.



### RISK FACTORS

A **needlestick injury** is a piercing wound caused by a needle/syringe or other sharps such as a scalpel.

These injuries are most common for workers handling needles in medical, dental, cleaning services and law enforcement settings.

Used sharps of all kinds can carry harmful viruses and bacteria. Coming in to contact with these sharps can lead to injury or serious illness like Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, or HIV, among others.

The risk is high with both freshly contaminated needles and those that have been left for some time. Workers in the medical, dental and other industries who administer needles, draw blood, or use scalpels during patient care may be at risk of injury if there is loss of control of the sharp object.

Improperly stored/disposed needles, such as those placed in a waste bin, those left lying around, or even those sticking out of an overflowing sharps container, can cause injury to an unsuspecting or unprotected worker in **ANY** industry.

### REDUCE THE RISK

It is important that workers at risk be informed by their employer of the hazards and consequences of a needlestick injury and are instructed on how to properly stay protected from injury. It is equally important that workers report every event to the employer involving a needlestick injury, an improperly disposed needle or other sharp object.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Ideally, needles should have protective caps or other safety features so that the worker does not come into contact with the sharp surface. If this is not possible, and the worker must work with current equipment, then reducing and managing the risk are the next best options.

- **Train** workers to **report** all needlestick injuries and all incidents of needles found or thrown into the regular garbage.
- For workers who work with needles and sharps, **train** them on the hazards and risks, and the proper use, storage and disposal of needles and other sharps. **Provide** wide mouth, puncture-proof, locking containers in areas where needles are used.
- Have a procedure for monitoring and replacing containers before they are filled - this should include instruction to seal, collect and dispose of the containers in accordance with local regulations for biomedical waste handling.
- **Provide** puncture-resistant gloves for workers who collect and dispose waste where sharps may be present.
- If a needlestick injury does occur, it is important to **act** swiftly to **minimize** any impact of infection to the worker, including making sure the worker seeks medical attention right away for blood testing and treatment as necessary.
- **Implement** and **enforce** written, step-by-step procedures for injured workers for post-exposure protocol.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKERS

- **Know** the risks involving needlestick injuries.
- **Be sure to follow** all proper procedures around the safe use, handling, storage and disposal of needles and other sharps - including safe recapping technique if required, eg., using a recapping device or the scoop method (many injuries occur during recapping).
- **Always** dispose of needles and other sharps in the proper container, and report to your employer when you see an overflowing container, or an improperly stored sharp.
- **Take** needlestick injuries very seriously and seek medical attention as quickly as possible. **Always** report any needlestick/sharp incidents to your employer and be sure to follow the employer's protocol for follow up blood testing.

