



Prevention Update

SHARPS AND NEEDLESTICK HAZARD MANAGEMENT

From 2010 to 2013, there were over 50 reported workplace injuries involving needles and syringes on Prince Edward Island. Injuries can happen at any stage of handling needles and other sharps, including usage, transfer, storage and disposal.

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 used and potentially infected needle/syringe (or other used sharp such as a scalpel).

- These injuries are most common for workers handling needles in medical, dental, cleaning services and law enforcement settings.
- Needlestick injuries are very serious because contact with used needles can transmit harmful viruses and bacteria to the worker. Diseases that can be transmitted include Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV, and are life-altering and even life-threatening.
- 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 the employer of the hazards and consequences of a needlestick injury and 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 or an improperly disposed needle or other sharp object.

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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 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 completely 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.
- Train workers to report all needlestick injuries and all incidents of needles found or thrown into the regular garbage.
- If a needlestick injury does occur, it is important to act swiftly to minimize any impact of infection to the worker, including ensuring 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.



If you have questions on this or any workplace safety topic, contact WCB Occupational Health & Safety at 902-368-5697 or toll free 1-800-237-5049, or visit our website at wcb.pe.ca.