



Preventing Needlestick Injuries Housekeeping Staff, Groundskeepers, and Waste Workers

Every year, 2 to 3 billion syringes are used outside of healthcare facilities. Most of these are from insulin injections and illegal drug use. Used syringes are not always disposed of safely. They may be left in public restrooms, parks and recreation areas, or hotel rooms. They may be discarded in the regular trash. Workers who are stuck with used syringes or other contaminated sharps are at risk of contracting HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and other bloodborne infections.

Recognize the Hazard

Employers should review their operations. If employees may encounter used syringes or other sharps waste during the course of their work, it is important that they know the hazards of these sharps. They should also know what the medical devices they may encounter look like (for example syringes, hypodermic needles, pen needles, intravenous needles, and lancets).

Use Safe Work Practices

Employers must plan on the safe handling of sharps waste **before** it is encountered. It is important that employees know and follow safe work practices to minimize their risk of injuries from needles and other sharps. Below are some suggested work practices:

- Have a sharps container nearby for safe disposal. Wear suitable gloves: they should be puncture resistant, protect against potential contamination, and provide dexterity. Don't place hands into areas or objects where you cannot see.
- A gloved hand can be used to pick up syringes by the barrel, with the needle end pointing away. If the syringe is partly hidden, entangled, or in an awkward position, use tongs or a litter picker to move it before picking it up by hand.
- With some sharps (such as needles and lancets), it may be difficult to avoid the sharp end. Use tongs or other tools to pick up these items. Be sure any tools used give a good grip and aren't awkward to use.
- Once a syringe or other sharp is picked up, it should be placed directly into a sharps container. Don't hold the sharps container when disposing of a sharp. The container should be placed firmly on a level surface or securely attached to a cart or other location.
- Do not manually compress trash bags. Carry trash bags without close bodily contact if possible. If close contact with bags cannot be avoided, the use of puncture-resistant protective clothing may be appropriate.

In Case of Injury

Employers should develop procedures for handling sharps injuries. Employees stuck by a needle or other sharp should:

- Immediately flood the exposed area with water and clean any wound with soap and water or a skin disinfectant if available.
- Report the injury immediately to the employer.
- Seek immediate medical attention for post-exposure management.

Some healthcare professionals may not be familiar with guidelines for the management of occupational exposures to HIV and other bloodborne pathogens. Therefore, the employer should select a knowledgeable healthcare provider for post-exposure management before any injuries occurs.

Develop and Implement an Exposure Control Plan

Anytime there is occupational exposure to blood or other potentially infectious material, Cal/OSHA requires the employer to establish and implement a written Exposure Control Plan. Therefore, employers must develop an Exposure Control Plan if their employees may need to handle sharps waste.

For More Information:

Visit these websites to learn more about preventing needlestick injuries: Cal/OSHA at www.dir.ca.gov/dosh; Federal OSHA at www.osha.gov; or State Fund at www.scif.com/safety/bloodborne pathogens.html □

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