

To the Point



Get the facts about
Sharps Injury Prevention



“To the Point – Get the Facts about Sharps Injury Prevention”

Each year, hundreds of thousands of health and community care workers accidentally injure themselves with a sharp that could be contaminated with a life-threatening pathogen.

Workers and employers must take every reasonable precaution to prevent sharps injuries from occurring.

This booklet will give you all the facts you need to know about sharps injury prevention.



What is a sharp?

Sharps that can cause injury and expose workers to dangerous pathogens include:

- Hypodermic needles
- Blood collection needles
- Suture needles
- Intravenous needles – catheter stylets and line needles
- Butterfly needles
- Allergy or acupuncture needles
- Scalpel blades
- Lancets
- Razor blades
- Scissors
- Metal wire
- Retractors
- Clamps
- Pins
- Staples
- Towel clips
- Bone cutters
- Glass specimen tubes
- Glass pipettes
- Glass capillary tubes



Who's at Risk?

Health and community care workers that are at risk for sharps injury include:

- Nurses
- Doctors
- Dentists and dental hygienists
- Personal support workers and health care aides
- Employees of rest homes or homes for the aged
- Central supply workers
- Community care workers
- Laundry workers
- Maintenance workers
- Food service workers
- Housekeepers and environmental service workers
- Laboratory technicians

Activities that put these workers at risk of a sharps injury include:

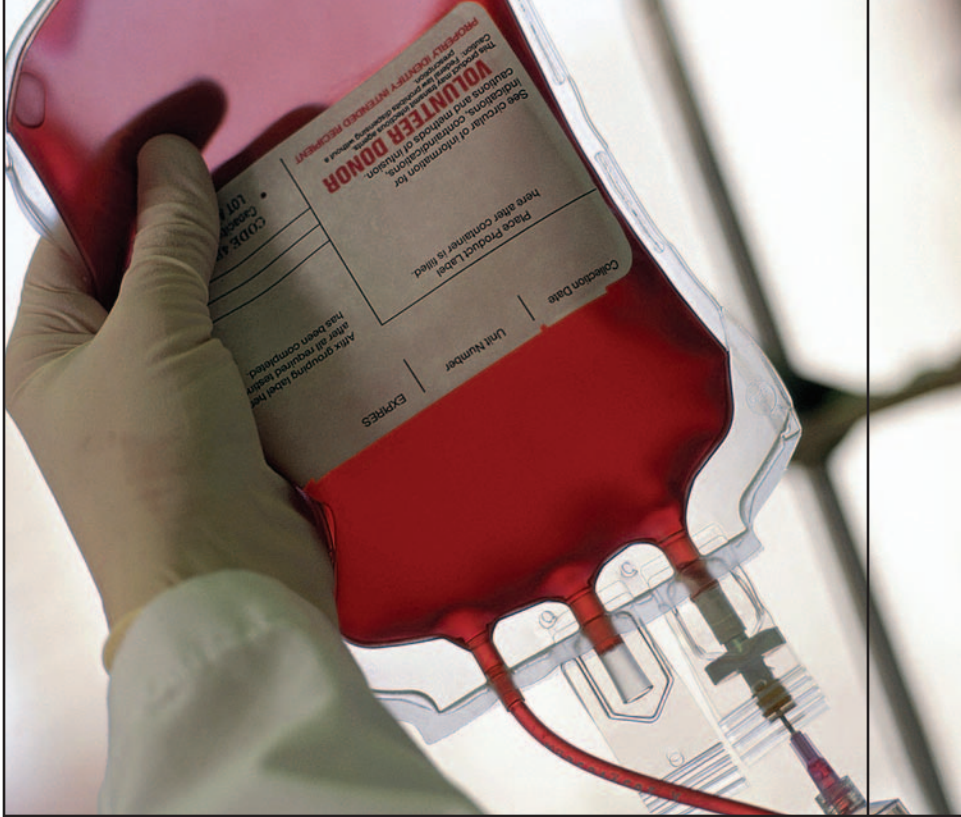
- Client injection
- Intravenous insertion
- Blood collection
- Operative or treatment procedure
- Specimen manipulation
- Cleaning and housekeeping
- Garbage removal
- Linen collection and cleaning
- Collecting and cleaning instruments
- Providing assistance with the activities of daily living



Risk Factors

It is critical to get to the root of the problem when analyzing the cause of a sharps injury. Some risk factors to consider include:

- Unsafe work practices
- Recapping needles
- Overfilled sharps disposal containers
- Sharps containers not available at the point of use
- Safer devices not used
- Lack of on-the-job training
- Lack of pre-employment education
- Lack of accountability for unsafe actions
- Understaffing and heavy workloads



The Impact

Transmission of blood-borne pathogens such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV can occur if a worker is exposed to infected blood from a sharps injury.

The seroconversion rate post sharps injury from a positive source is
hepatitis B – 30% **hepatitis C – 3%** **HIV – 0.3%**

Other pathogens that can be transmitted include tuberculosis, herpes, malaria and syphilis.

The risk of infection depends on the following factors:

- Type of body substance involved (e.g. blood)
- Route of exposure
- Volume of body substance involved
- Severity of exposure
- Pathogen involved
- Degree of viremia (amount of virus present)
- Immune status of worker
- Post-exposure prophylaxis regimen



Prevention

The health and community care worker can do a great deal to prevent a sharps injury. Some strategies to follow include:

- Never re-cap needles
- Use sharps with safety features
- Immediately discard used sharps in a puncture resistant sharps disposal container
- Keep disposal containers close to the point of use and seal and replace containers when they are three-quarters full
- Laundry and maintenance personnel should not carry garbage or linen bags close to their body
- Participate in training on safe handling of sharps and ask your employer for more information when you require it
- If you find a sharps hazard, report it and take steps to eliminate it
- Report all sharps injuries or near misses
- Get a hepatitis B vaccination



Treatment of a sharps injury

In the event that you receive a sharps injury, take the following steps:

- 1) Immediately flush the area to clean it and apply a skin disinfectant
- 2) Report your sharps injury to your supervisor as soon as possible
- 3) As soon as possible, attend your occupational health department or local emergency department to have your risk of acquiring an infectious disease assessed.
- 4) If there is a risk of acquiring hepatitis B, get a Hepatitis B Immune Globulin injection within 48 hours if you have not already received the vaccine.
- 5) If there is a risk of acquiring HIV, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) drugs should be offered within a few hours of the injury.
- 6) Comply with follow up testing schedules to determine whether seroconversion has occurred.



Employer Strategies

Legally and morally, employers must provide a safe workplace for their employees. Regarding prevention of sharps injuries, there is a great deal that employers can do to prevent sharps injuries. Some of these strategies include:

- Investigate and analyze all sharps injuries
- Develop and enforce organizational policies and procedures regarding sharps
- Initial and continual training and education
- Continuous improvement of disposal systems
- Implement new technologies including needleless systems, retractable devices and recapping devices
- Hepatitis B vaccination programs
- Encourage reporting
- Record keeping



The Law

The Occupational Health and Safety Act requires employers to take every reasonable precaution in the circumstances for the protection of the worker (Section 25 (2)(h)). This includes protecting workers from sharps injuries.

The Health Care and Residential Facilities regulation requires employers to develop, establish and put into effect measures and procedures for the health and safety of workers (Section 8). The regulation also requires employers to have written procedures for the handling and disposal of sharp objects (Section 9(1)(13)). Sections 113 and 114 outline the requirements for disposing of sharps in puncture-resistant containers.

Links

Information on the prevention of sharps injuries in health and community care workplaces can be found at the following web sites:

Ontario Safety Association for Community & Healthcare

www.osach.ca

Health Canada

www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

www.osha.gov

National Institutes of Health

www.nih.gov



Ontario Safety Association
for Community & Healthcare

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