

# 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 “percutation 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 percutation injuries occur during use.
- Approximately 42% of percutation 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 a 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