

# Needlesticks and Sharps – Don't Get Stuck

Needlesticks and other medical sharps devices injure more than 70,000 Canadian workers each year – the majority sustained by nurses. Health-care workers are forced to use unsafe devices simply because they are cheaper and current health and safety laws allow this practice to continue. Eliminating these preventable hazards is a legitimate concern for all workers at risk.

## Risk of Injury

The highest risk is from hollow-bore, blood-filled needles. Specific features make some devices more dangerous:

- ▲ Hollow-bore needles
- ▲ Needle devices that have to be taken apart or manipulated by the worker
- ▲ Devices that retain an exposed needle after use
- ▲ Needles that are attached to tubing

## Risk of Disease

Sharps injuries expose workers to a number of bloodborne pathogens that can cause serious or fatal infections. The pathogens that pose the greatest risk are:

- ▲ Hepatitis B virus (HBV)
- ▲ Hepatitis C virus (HCV)
- ▲ Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

HBV vaccination has been proven to be highly effective in preventing infection. However, no vaccine exists to prevent HCV or HIV infection.

## Eliminating the Risk

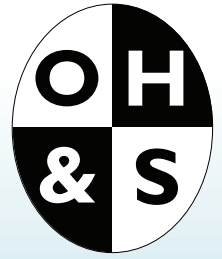
Controlling the hazard at the source is the best and most effective approach to occupational health and safety. Safety engineered needles and medical sharps are the primary method of eliminating and reducing sharps injuries. These devices afford the worker with the best protection because the safety features are incorporated into the device.

## What can you do?

- ▲ Report all needlestick and sharps injuries promptly to ensure you receive appropriate care.
- ▲ Tell your supervisor and your local OH&S representatives about any needlestick/sharps hazard – fill out an UNA OH&S report form.
- ▲ Insist on safety-engineered devices in your workplace.
- ▲ Get a hepatitis vaccination.

## What to do if you sustain an injury

- ▲ Wash the wound with soap and water ASAP
- ▲ Report the injury to your supervisor
- ▲ Report to OH&S or the Employer
- ▲ Document the incident (employer's report form)
- ▲ Follow up with your own physician
- ▲ Get post-exposure medications (if appropriate) within two hours of exposure
- ▲ Get follow up testing and confidential counseling
- ▲ File a WCB workers report of injury or illness
- ▲ File a UNA OH&S complaint form



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United Nurses of Alberta