

Needlestick and sharp-object injuries

Explain dangers

Occasionally workers may encounter needles, syringes, or razors on the job. Certain workplaces may be at a higher risk of encountering these types of hazards, including:

- Housing or shelter projects
- Public washrooms
- The bottom of elevator shafts
- Marijuana grow-operations
- Illegal drug labs

The main risk to workers who have a needlestick injury is exposure to viruses such as Hepatitis B and C and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Hepatitis B is an illness that affects the liver. It causes liver inflammation, vomiting, and jaundice. Over the long term, it can cause scarring of the liver and liver cancer. It can eventually lead to death.

Hepatitis C also affects the liver and can cause fever, loss of appetite, fatigue, and jaundice. Over longer periods of time, it causes scar tissue and liver failure. Some people may have no symptoms for many years but can still infect others.

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, causing infection. When the body cannot fight infections anymore, the disease becomes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Identify controls

- Use adequate lighting when working in dark areas to avoid any accidental contact with used needles or other sharp objects.
- Accidental contact with used needles can be avoided by following some simple procedures.
- If you find a needle or syringe, always assume it is contaminated.
- Before picking up the needle, notify your supervisor for direction. If your supervisor is not nearby, have another worker get the supervisor. Never leave the needle alone.
- Use pliers, tongs, or tweezers to pick up needles, syringes, or glass stems. Never use your hands.

- Put the needle or object in a strong container (e.g., a glass, metal, or durable plastic jar) for disposal. Do not use a pop bottle.
- Open the lid of the container first and then bring it close to the needle or object. This will minimize the distance you have to carry the material. Then close the lid securely.
- Hold the needle tip away from you at all times.
- Do not dispose of needles in the garbage. Many municipalities in Ontario have needle disposal sites. If possible, used needles should be dropped off at these designated locations.

What to do if you accidentally prick yourself?

1. Let the wound bleed.
2. Flush the area with water or wash with soap and water. If the skin has been broken, apply a topical antiseptic solution (e.g., iodine, isopropyl alcohol).
3. Do not apply disinfectants to the eyes, nose, or mouth.
4. Bandage the wound.
5. Seek immediate medical attention at the hospital emergency department.

Demonstrate

Point out the location of the nearest needle disposal site to your crew.

If your company has other disposal procedures, explain them to workers.