



NIOSH **FAST FACTS**

Home Healthcare Workers

How to Prevent Needlestick and Sharps Injuries

Needlestick and other sharps injuries are a serious hazard in any healthcare setting. Contact with contaminated needles, scalpels, broken glass, and other sharps may expose healthcare workers to blood that contains pathogens which pose a grave, potentially lethal risk.

ACTIVITIES WITH POTENTIAL FOR NEEDLESTICK INJURIES

Home healthcare workers can be at risk for needlestick or sharps injuries when they:

- Handle needles that must be taken apart or manipulated after use.
- Dispose of needles attached to tubing.
- Manipulate the needle in the client.
- Recap a needle.
- Use needles or glass equipment to transfer body fluid between containers.
- Fail to dispose of used needles in puncture-resistant sharps containers.
- Lack proper workstations for procedures using sharps.
- Work quickly.
- Bump into a needle, a sharp, or another worker while either person is holding a sharp.

EMPLOYERS SHOULD

- Establish a bloodborne pathogen control program that meets all of the requirements of the OSHA bloodborne pathogens standard (<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/bloodbornepathogens/index.html>).
- Eliminate the use of needle devices whenever safe and effective alternatives are available.
- Provide needle devices with safety features.
- Provide sharps containers for workers to bring into clients' homes.
- Investigate all sharps-related injuries.
- Provide post-exposure medical evaluations.

EMPLOYEES SHOULD

- Avoid using needles whenever safe and effective alternatives are available.
- Avoid recapping or bending needles that might be contaminated.



- Bring standard-labeled, leak-proof, puncture-resistant sharps containers to clients' homes. Do not assume such containers will be available there. Promptly dispose of used needle devices and sharps, which might be contaminated, in the containers.
- Plan for the safe handling and disposal of needles before use.
- Store sharps containers out of the reach of children, pets, and others not needing access.
- Secure used sharps containers during transport to prevent spilling.
- Follow standard precautions, infection prevention, and general hygiene practices consistently.
- Participate in your employer's bloodborne pathogens training program.
- Help your employer select and evaluate devices with safety features.
- Use devices with safety features provided by your employer.
- Report any needlestick and other sharps injury immediately to your employer.

If you experience a needlestick or sharps injury or are exposed to the blood or other body fluid of a client during the course of your work, immediately follow these steps:

- Wash needlesticks and cuts with soap and water.
- Flush splashes to the nose, mouth, or skin with water.
- Irrigate eyes with clean water, saline, or sterile irrigants.
- Report the incident to your supervisor.
- Immediately seek medical treatment.

This is one in a series of six fast fact cards developed to provide practical advice for home healthcare workers and is based on *NIOSH Hazard Review: Occupational Hazards in Home Healthcare*, NIOSH Pub No. 2010-125.

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