

Needle Stick Injuries: Protecting Workers in the Education Sector

This PSHSA Fast Fact is intended to provide information on preventing, reporting and managing needle stick injuries in the education sector

Risk of Occupational Illness Resulting from a Needle Stick

Needle stick injuries pose a risk if the needle is contaminated with Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or HIV virus.

The risk of contracting an occupational disease caused by a needle stick depends on a number of factors:

- the depth of penetration of the needle,
- the amount of contaminated blood on the needle
- when the needle was used,
- the health status of the infected needle user and
- the immune status of the injured worker

The risk of disease may be low, but the emotional trauma resulting from a needle stick injury can be serious.

High Risk Jobs

- Teachers
- Teaching Assistants
- Volunteers
- Grounds Maintenance Staff
- Custodial Staff
- School Secretaries
- School Bus Drivers
- Anyone who comes in contact with people who use needles

What are the Employer's Responsibilities?

Employers who identify a risk of needle stick injuries must comply with Ontario Occupational Health & Safety Act:

- 1) Develop and implement control plans that eliminate or minimize the risk of exposure to needle sticks
- 2) Provide training that details the risks, reporting procedures, safe work practices and proper disposal techniques
- 3) Conduct incident investigations and identify and implement control measures
- 4) Provide workers with the equipment, tools and personal protective equipment (PPE) they need as well as training on proper use
- 5) Comply with the Needle Safety Regulation. It applies to all workers who use hollow bore needles for therapeutic, preventative, palliative, diagnostic or cosmetic purpose in any workplace

The First Aid Regulation under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act requires employers to post form 82:

“In Case of Injury at Work”:

1. Get first aid immediately if needed. Follow your organization's protocol/procedure for needle stick injuries

2. Worker: Tell your employer about the injury. Employer: Arrange for and pay for transportation to get medical care, if needed
 3. Employer: pay worker's wages for day of injury
 4. Employer: Report injury to WSIB within 3 days if it involves health care treatment or time away from work or lost wages
- Never reach into bushes/leaves to retrieve anything. Use a "picker" to drag an object to see what it is before handling
 - Do not reach with your hands for objects you can't see
 - Perform routine sweeps of areas where there is a risk of discarded needles
 - Instruct staff to never dispose of needles in regular garbage
 - Install CSA sharps containers in public areas as appropriate
 - Promote immunization for Hepatitis B

What are the Workers' Responsibilities?

- 1) Attend education sessions provided by your employer
- 2) Use controls and follow safe work practices established by your employer for your protection
- 3) Use prescribed PPE and appropriate tools
- 4) Know how to report injuries from needle sticks or sharps contaminated with blood or body fluids
- 5) Get immediate first aid and medical attention (within 2 hours) of the injury

Strategies to Prevent Injuries

- Provide training for key staff in how to deal with needles. i.e. wear appropriate gloves, use tongs and discard needles in approved sharps containers
- Always wear gloves and use tongs to pick up garbage

Student Safety

Provide needle safety education to students: never pick up a discarded needle with your hands; report the incident immediately; report sharps injuries immediately; obtain first aid immediately and receive medical advice within 2 hours of the incident. Promote immunization for Hepatitis B to students.

For more information:

Contact your regional PSHSA consultant at www.pshsa.ca

Copies of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations may be downloaded from <http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/navigation?file=home&lang=en>
A listing of the Ministry of Labour offices may be found at www.labour.gov.on.ca

Ont. Reg1101 - First Aid Requirements under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997

References: PSHSA, A Planning Guide to the Implementation of Safety Engineered Medical Sharps, www.pshsa.ca

Work Safe BC, Hidden Threat, Don't be caught off guard by discarded needles, www.worksafebc.com