Needle stick injury protocol

**What are sharps?**

'Sharps' are needles, blades (such as scalpels) and other medical instruments that are necessary for carrying out healthcare work and could cause an injury by cutting or pricking the skin.

**What is a sharps injury?**

A sharps injury is an incident, which causes a needle, blade (such as scalpel) or other medical instruments to penetrate the skin. This is sometimes called a percutaneous injury.

**What to do if you receive a sharps injury**

If you suffer an injury from a sharp which may be contaminated:

* Encourage the wound to gently bleed, ideally holding it under running water
* Wash the wound using running water and plenty of soap
* Don't scrub the wound whilst you are washing it
* Don't suck the wound
* Dry the wound and cover it with a waterproof plaster or dressing
* Seek urgent medical advice (for example from your Occupational Health Service) as effective prophylaxis (medicines to help fight infection) are available
* Report the injury to your line manager and a record needs to be made in the incident book.

**What is the risk?**

The main risk from a sharps injury is the potential exposure to infections such as blood-borne viruses (BBV). This can occur where the injury involves a sharp that is contaminated with blood or a bodily fluid from a patient. The blood-borne viruses of most concern are:

* Hepatitis B (HBV)
* Hepatitis C (HCV)
* Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

The transmission of infection depends on a number of factors, including the person's natural immune system. We know the number of injuries each year is high, but only a small number are known to have caused infections that led to serious illness. However, the effects of the injury and anxiety about its potential consequences, including the adverse side effects of post-exposure prophylaxis can have a significant personal impact on an injured employee.

**Who is at risk?**

Workers and others in health and social care are at risk. This includes those who directly handle sharps but also includes workers who may inadvertently be put at risk when sharps are not stored or disposed of correctly.

There is a higher risk of infection from a sharps injury involving hollow-bore needles. Higher risk procedures include intra-vascular cannulation, venepuncture and injections and use of IV cannulae, winged steel-butterfly-needles, needles and syringes and phlebotomy needles.

**What the law says**

Health and safety law applies to risks from sharps injuries, just as it does to other risks from work activities. Relevant legislation includes:

* The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.
* The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 2002
* The Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999
* The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)