Bloodborne Pathogens and Needlestick Prevention

Protecting Workers When Handling Contaminated Sharps

Sharps are objects that can penetrate a worker’s skin, such as needles, scalpels, broken glass, capillary tubes and the exposed ends of dental wires. If blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM), as defined in the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens standard (29 CFR 1910.1030), are present or may be present on the sharp, it is a contaminated sharp and appropriate personal protective equipment must be worn.

A needlestick or a cut from a contaminated sharp can result in a worker being infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), and other bloodborne pathogens. The standard specifies measures to reduce these types of injuries and the risk of infection. Careful handling of contaminated sharps can prevent injury and reduce the risk of infection. Employers must ensure that workers follow these work practices to decrease the workers’ chances of contracting bloodborne diseases.

5 WAYS TO PREVENT SHARPS AND NEEDLESTICK INJURIES

1. Plan safe handling and disposal before any procedure.
2. Use safe and effective needle alternatives when available.
3. Activate the device’s safety features.
4. Immediately dispose of contaminated needles in OSHA-compliant sharps containers.
5. Complete bloodborne pathogens training.

General Guidance

Engineering controls are the primary means of eliminating or minimizing employee exposure and include the use of safer medical devices, such as needleless devices, shielded needle devices, and plastic capillary tubes.

Best practices for preventing sharps and needlestick injuries include:
- Plan safe handling and disposal before any procedure.
- Use safe and effective needle alternatives when available.
- Use needles with engineered sharps injury protection (SESIPs).
- Always activate the device’s safety features.
- Do not pass used sharps between workers.
- Do not recap, shear, or break contaminated needles.
- Immediately dispose of contaminated needles in properly secured, puncture-resistant, closable, leak-proof, labeled sharps containers.
- Complete Bloodborne Pathogens training.

For more information, please contact HIOSH at: dlir.hiosh.ct@hawaii.gov or 808-586-9100