

# Hepatitis C: Workplace Issues

This fact sheet was produced by the Hepatitis Council of WA; it is intended to act as a guide for health and community service organisations to prevent blood-borne virus transmission in the workplace.

Topics covered are:

- |                |                        |                |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| ☒ Blood Spills | ☒ Sharps Disposal      | ☒ Disclosure & |
| ☒ First Aid    | ☒ Needlestick Injuries | Discrimination |

## ***Blood Spills***

- Where possible, spills should be promptly attended to by the *injured* individual
- Always wear disposable gloves when cleaning up any blood spill
- If available, wear other personal protective equipment such as aprons, face masks, protective eyewear, shoe covers etc
- Wash the area thoroughly with lukewarm soapy water (extremely cold or hot water coagulates blood, which makes it harder to clean effectively)
- Disinfect the area (e.g. with bleach)
- Place any bloodied materials in two plastic bags, one inside the other (including the gloves used for cleaning) and discard into domestic waste
- Wash any clothes with small blood splatters in cold water in the normal manner
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap under running water for at least 30 seconds

## ***First Aid***

- Adhere to the recommended principles of First Aid: DRABCD
- At least one OH&S representative should be trained in the control and management of blood-borne viruses in the workplace
- Intact skin is the best defence – cover all cuts and abrasions with a waterproof dressing
- Theoretically, there is a low risk of blood-borne virus transmission when giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation; however, people trained in First Aid should not hesitate to give life support if needed. Single use plastic masks can act as a barrier to prevent blood-borne virus transmission (a t-shirt can also be used in place of a mask and can reduce the risk of transmission)
- To protect confidentiality of hepatitis C positive staff be pro-active, rather than reactive when implementing workplace policies and procedures in regard to the prevention of blood-borne virus transmission (e.g. employ standard infection control measures for all staff and service users)

## ***Needlestick Injuries***

- Any clothing contaminated with blood should be removed
- Wash the injury site *gently* with mild soap and running water as soon as possible for at least 30 seconds
- Cover the injury site with a clean dressing (antiseptic is optional)
- To discard of the needle, place it in a rigid plastic container (see 'Sharps Disposal')
- Seek medical advice, preferably within 24 hours (baseline testing is optional but recommended – the window period for hepatitis C is approximately three months)
- There is currently no post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) available for hepatitis C

### ***Sharps Disposal***

- Sharps containers can be ordered from MediCollect or Pink Health Care (details below)
- Use hands (gloved), not tongs or other instruments, to pick up discarded needles
- NEVER attempt to recap needles
- If needles are found in public places on a regular basis, contact the Environmental Health Officer in your local shire or city (HCWA has an up to date contact list available)

#### **If you find a discarded needle:**

- Avoid touching the sharp end
- Pick the needle up by the barrel (the blunt end)
- Do not remove the needle from the syringe
- Do not attempt to snap off the needle
- Place in a sharps container, point first – if this is not available, use a clear plastic bottle (e.g. a soft drink bottle with a screw-on lid); tighten the lid
- Place bottle in domestic waste, NOT a recycling bin

### ***Disclosure & Discrimination***

- People living with hepatitis C are *not* required to disclose their status except in the following circumstances: healthcare workers conducting exposure prone procedures; life insurance policy stipulation; Australian Defence Force member; or when donating blood.
- Employees living with any blood-borne virus (HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B or hepatitis C) should be treated in the same manner as any other individual
- All information pertaining to an individual employee, including blood-borne virus status, should be kept confidential
- Discrimination is illegal under Australian federal law

### ***Further Reading, Resources & Contacts***

- See 'Infection Control Guidelines for the Prevention of Transmission of Infectious Diseases in the Health Care Setting' (2004) for detailed information. This document was produced by the Department of Health & Aging and is available at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/content/icg-guidelines-index.htm> (or enter the document title and year into an internet search engine). This is a very large document; chapters 13, 14, 23 and 24 are the most relevant.
- See also Operational Circular #2039/06 'Standard and Additional Infection Control Precautions' (2006). This was produced by the WA Department of Health and is available at <http://www.health.wa.gov.au/circularsnew/search.cfm>
- The pamphlet 'Safe Disposal of Needles and Syringes' (code HP5780) is available from the WA Department of Health (phone 1300 135 030)
- For sharps containers contact MediCollect ([www.medicollect.com.au](http://www.medicollect.com.au)) or Pink Health Care at [www.pinkhealthcare.com.au](http://www.pinkhealthcare.com.au)
- A part-time Safe Disposal Worker is employed by the WA Substance Users' Association (WASUA). Please phone (08) 9321 2877 for more information.

Tailored workplace education about hepatitis C is available through the Hepatitis Council of WA. For more information contact our Workforce Development Officer on (08) 9227 9806 or [wdo@hepatitiswa.com.au](mailto:wdo@hepatitiswa.com.au)