

WORKPLACE ISSUES



This factsheet has been produced by HepatitisWA; it is intended to act as a guide to prevent blood borne virus transmission in the workplace.

TOPICS COVERED ARE:

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

BLOOD SPILLS

- Where possible, spills should be promptly attended to by the injured individual
- Always wear disposable gloves when cleaning up any blood spills
- 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: DRSABC
- 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 staff living with a blood borne virus, organisations should 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 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.

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, 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 518 963)
- For sharps containers contact MediCollect (www.medicollect.com.au) or Pink Health Care at 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 VIRAL HEPATITIS IS AVAILABLE BY HEPATITISWA.
FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT OUR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER ON
(08) 9227 9806 OR wdo@hepatitiswa.com.au**