

Say No to Infection: Management of Inoculation (sharps) injuries Fact Sheet



What is an inoculation incident?

An inoculation incident is where the blood/blood-stained body fluid of one person could gain entry another person's body, such as:

- A sharps/needlestick injury with a used needle.
- Splash of blood- or blood-stained fluid into the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Human bite causing the skin to be broken, rash or burn.
- Spillage of blood or body fluid onto damaged skin, e.g., graze, cut, rash, burn.

Prevention of an inoculation injury

- Good practice in the safe management of sharps.
- Disposable gloves and apron must be worn when providing direct 'hands on' care, or there is a risk of exposure to blood or body fluids. Gloves and apron should be changed between each task.
- If there is risk of splashing of blood and/or body fluids to the face, safety glasses or a visor should be worn to protect the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Cover any cuts or abrasions with impermeable (waterproof) dressings to provide a barrier.

All staff should be educated in the safe use, disposal and secure storage, of sharps and the action to take in the event of an injury.

The risk of an inoculation injury

The main risk from an inoculation injury is the potential exposure to infection such as blood-borne viruses (BBV).

The blood-borne viruses of concern are:

- Hepatitis B (HBV)
- Hepatitis C (HCV)
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

For further information please see SNTI Blood Borne Viruses fact sheet

Action to be taken in the event of an inoculation injury

In the event of a needlestick/sharps injury

- 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 while 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 fight infection) are available.

In the event of a splash injury to eyes, nose, or mouth

- Rinse affected area thoroughly with copious amounts of running water.

In the event of a bite or skin contamination

- Wash affected area with liquid soap and warm running water, dry and cover with a waterproof dressing.

In all cases

- **Report the injury to your manager immediately**
- **Immediately contact your GP. Out of GP surgery hours, attend the nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department.**

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/needlesticks/>