NEEDLE STICK INJURY PROTOCOL

What should I do if I injure myself with a used needle?

If you pierce or puncture your skin with a used needle, follow this first aid advice immediately:

- encourage the wound to bleed, ideally by holding it under running water
- wash the wound using running water and plenty of soap
- do not scrub the wound while you're washing it
- do not suck the wound
- dry the wound and cover it with a waterproof plaster or dressing

You should also seek urgent medical advice as you may need treatment to reduce the risk of getting an infection:

- contact your employer's Occupational Health service if you injure yourself at work
- otherwise call your GP, or go to the nearest ER or Urgent Care

Needle-stick injuries

Injuries from needles used in medical procedures are sometimes called needle-stick or sharps injuries.

Sharps can include other medical supplies, such as syringes, scalpels and lancets, and glass from broken equipment.

Once someone has used a needle, viruses in their blood, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV, may contaminate it. This includes needles used to inject illegal drugs. Blood can also contaminate sharps.

Assessing your injury

The healthcare professional treating you will assess the risks to your health and ask about your injury – for example, how and when it happened, or who had used the needle.

Samples of your blood may need to be tested for hepatitis B and C or HIV.

Although rare, there's also a small risk of other infections being transmitted through contaminated blood, such as cytomegalovirus (CMV) and Epstein-Barr virus, which causes glandular fever.

Your healthcare professional may also arrange to test samples of the other person's blood if they give their consent.

Will I need any treatment?

If your healthcare professional thinks you're at low risk of infection, you may not need any treatment.

If there's a higher risk of infection, you may need:

- antibiotic treatment – for example, if you have cellulitis (infection of the skin)
- vaccination against hepatitis B
- treatment to prevent HIV

If there's a high risk of infection with HIV, your healthcare professional may consider treatment called post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

Getting support

Your healthcare professional may recommend that you get:

- support from your employer's occupational health service – they can also advise about sick leave
- psychological support – such as council intervention to help with any stress the injury has caused

If you injure yourself with a used needle at work, report the incident immediately to your supervisor or manager.