Needle Stick Accident

Needle stick accident is being stuck by a needle that may have the blood from another person on it. Most of the time these injuries heal without any problem, but several diseases can be transmitted this way. You should be aware of the risks. If you have not had a tetanus booster within the past 10 years, you should have a booster. **If the puncture site becomes red, swollen, more painful, or drains pus, you will need antibiotic treatment for the infection.**

The most significant risk is for getting:

- Hepatitis B.
- Hepatitis C.
- HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS).

The chance of getting one of these infections is small. It is important to take proper precautions. All health care workers or others exposed to human blood should be immunized against Hepatitis B. Immunization should begin right away. This is especially true if you have not had previous Hepatitis B protection. If the blood on the needle is known to be high risk for Hepatitis B or HIV, additional treatment is needed. A standard treatment for Hepatitis C exposure has not been identified. You should ask your health care provider for their advice for treatment and follow-up.

The risk of transmitting AIDS by accidental needle stick is extremely small. It depends on the volume of blood, the stage of the illness of the source and other factors. On average it occurs in 3 out of 1,000 accidents. Infection with HIV is likely to be serious and lifelong. Exposed people with high risk are advised to take a combination of anti-HIV drugs. **Treatment should be started as soon as possible after exposure**.

The recommended period of post-exposure prophylaxis or PEP (treatment with medications) is usually 4 weeks. You should have follow-up counseling and medical evaluation including HIV blood tests now. The tests should be repeated at 6 weeks, 3 months, and 6 months. Blood tests to monitor the toxic effects of the PEP medicines are usually recommended at baseline (immediately before treatment starts) and again at 2 weeks. Call your caregiver or the emergency room if you have any concerns about your accident, exposure risk, or treatment and follow-up.

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