Accidental Needle Stick Injury in Public Places

Description:

In the community setting, a needle stick injury usually arises from the accidental puncturing of the skin by a syringe needle left in places such as in parks, playgrounds, laneways or public toilets. When a person suffers a needle stick injury, there is usually anxiety and distress. This is a natural response when thoughts of potential infection with blood borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and C occur.

What to do:

When somebody accidentally gets pricked by a needle:

- as soon as possible, wash the area around the puncture for at least 30 seconds, using soap and warm water. Bottled water can also be used if no hand washing facilities are available.
- cover the site with bandaid or similar dressing
- seek medical advice immediately
- if able to do so, put the needle in a rigid-walled, puncture resistant container and seal or securely close the container. As an example, an empty tin with a taped down lid. This container can then be put in into an ordinary rubbish bin. If there are any concerns, contact the local council or the Queensland Clean Needle Helpline (1800 NEEDLE/1800 633 353)
- don't panic - the risk of catching a serious infection as a result of an accidental needle stick injury is very low, because these viruses do not survive for long outside of the body.

Helpful Hints:

Seeking medical attention as soon as possible is important as some medications and vaccinations work best if taken soon after exposure. A health practitioner should also give advice on the possible need and timing of HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C testing if required. People often have questions about testing of a syringe that may have caused a needle stick injury for the presence of viruses such as HIV or hepatitis C. Such testing is not routinely conducted as environmental conditions such as sunlight and heat can degrade evidence of these viruses and make test results unreliable.

Treatment:

Treatment, reassurance, counselling and advice can be obtained from:

- local GP
- hospital emergency department
- sexual health clinic - see Telstra White Pages for contacts.

In many cases, treatment of the needle mark and counselling is all that is needed. Counselling is an essential part of the support people should receive and is useful in reducing potential stress and anxiety. How much counselling each person requires will depend on each individual, and will take into account knowledge of disease transmission, risk and level of anxiety. All treatment and enquiries are dealt with confidentially.

You can also call the Queensland Clean Needle Helpline (phone number previous page) for information and advice, and to obtain a brochure titled What to Do If You Find Used Syringes.

Other Resources:

Queensland Health fact sheets on blood borne infections can be found at http://www.health.qld.gov.au/sexhealth/adults/bbv.asp or by contacting the local public health unit.

Other resources on Sharps Safety Programs can be found at http://www.health.qld.gov.au/chrisp/resources/sharps_safety.asp
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