

# Sharps and splash injuries

Information and advice for patients

## *Occupational Health & Wellbeing*

### **What is a Sharps/Splash injury?**

A sharps injury is when a health care worker is accidentally stabbed by a sharp instrument (such as a needle) that may have had contact with blood or other body fluids from a patient. A splash injury is when body fluids have splashed into an open cut, wound or membrane such as the eye from a patient to a health care worker.

A member of staff has been exposed to your blood or body fluids through a sharps or splash injury (you are the source). **You are not at any risk from this injury.**

### **What will happen next?**

Any virus you have could be passed onto the person who had the injury. For this reason we would like to ask you some personal questions and test your blood for 3 viruses: Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV. This will help us to decide which treatment is best for the health care worker who has had the injury.

The tests on your blood are the same as those performed when you donate blood and we will only do them with your consent. You have not been singled out; it is hospital policy to approach all patients in this situation and your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

### **What are the benefits of the blood test?**

The benefit of the test is that it will allow the health care worker who has been exposed to your body fluids to have the correct treatment. If any of your results are positive it will also allow you and them to access the appropriate treatment at an early stage. If your results are negative it will prevent the health care worker from needing to have 6 months of screening.

You are asked to have the test even if you do not have any symptoms of the viruses because people can have these viruses for many years without experiencing any symptoms.

### **What are the risks of the blood test?**

The main risk of having a blood test is discomfort or bruising at the site where the needle goes in but these are usually minor and go away shortly after the test.

Having a test for these viruses and then having a negative result will not affect any request for life or travel insurance. An insurance company will only ask if you have had a positive result or if you are receiving treatment for one or more of these viruses.

### **Are there any alternative tests?**

There are no alternative tests for these viruses.

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### **What are the risks of not having the test?**

You have the right to refuse the blood test and to answering the personal questions relating to this incident. If you do not have the test there is a risk that you could have undiagnosed Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or HIV and have passed this to the health care worker, any sexual partners or unborn children, and could delay the appropriate treatment being given.

In addition to this, if you do not have the test the injured health care worker will need to have further screening to determine whether they have contracted a virus.

### **How do I get the results?**

Your doctor will inform you of the results as soon as they are ready and a copy of the results will be sent to the hospital Occupational Health and Wellbeing service so they can arrange the appropriate follow-up for the health care worker. Your results will be kept confidential and will only be shared with your consent with those involved in your care.

If any of the viruses are present in your blood all necessary arrangements for treatment will be made.

### **Further information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the issues raised in this leaflet please discuss these with the doctor in charge of your care. You can also visit the Health Protection Agency website or contact the hospital Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service for further information:

#### **Health Protection Agency**

[www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

#### **Occupational Health & Wellbeing Service**

Telephone: 0121 507 3306

Monday – Friday, 8.30am – 4.30pm

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website:

#### **Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust**

[www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk)

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### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Health Protection Agency, 'Eye of the needle', November 2008
- Department of Health, 'HIV post-exposure prophylaxis: Guidance from the UK Chief Medical Officers' Expert Advisory Group on AIDS', September 2008
- Royal College of Physicians, 'HIV testing for patients attending general medical services: national guidelines', March 2005
- NHS Employers, 'Needlestick injury', February 2011

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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