

# PLAYING IT **SAFE**

Be safe and healthy on the job at with these helpful tips provided by  
**Texas Medical Group.**

## Hand and Finger Protection

*Ways to keep yourself safe in a health care setting*

The risk that hand, wrist and finger injuries pose in health care settings is unique because it is associated with another, more serious risk: that of infection with diseases like Hepatitis B and C or HIV. Even injuries that do not result in infection bear the psychological trauma of waiting for definitive test results. In order to effectively prevent hand injury and exposure to blood in a health care setting, you must appreciate and understand the causes of injury and plan practical ways to prevent them.

### Sharps Injuries

Many hospital sharps injuries occur in the operating room and most are on the thumb and index finger of the non-dominant hand, due to scalpel and needle mishaps. A worker may not realize he or she is exposed to blood on the hands until after removing gloves. Pay attention when you are involved in common surgical activities like the following, which often result in injury.

### Assembly and Disassembly of Sharps

Injuries are common when mounting the scalpel blade to the handle. One way to prevent cutting yourself is to use a forceps to hold the blade, without covering the cutting edge.

### Transfer Between Team Members

This type of high-risk sharps transfer can easily result in injury if one of the parties involved loses concentration. An easy way to avoid these injuries is to use a neutral zone, such as a tray or a mat, to pass instruments. The neutral zone should be big enough to easily contain

the sharps, not easily tipped or easily mobile.

### During Use

When fingers are used as a backstop or guide, and the other hand is protecting the surrounding area, there is a high risk of hand or finger injury. Whenever a sharp is in use, do not anticipate any hand movements, and never assume anything. Use verbal warnings to anticipate transfer of sharps, and keep your eyes on them until they are safely returned to the safe zone.

### Disposal

If you attempt to recap a needle or scalpel, you are at an elevated risk of injuring yourself; this practice should always be avoided. You also risk cutting yourself if you attempt to use a sharps disposal container that is already full, has a small opening or is improperly positioned.

### Needles

Needlesticks are a common risk inside and outside of the operating room. Never recap needles, and immediately dispose of them after use in appropriate, unfilled containers.

### If You Are Exposed

If you are injured, immediately flood the area with water and disinfect it. Notify your supervisor immediately so that your risk of infection can be evaluated as soon as possible. cares about your safety.



### Why Shouldn't I Recap?

Recapping accounts for a large portion of needlestick injuries in nursing and laboratory staff. Often, it is the single most common cause. It is extremely dangerous to hold a needle in one hand and attempt to cover it with a small cap held in the other hand.

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