



Are you required to use safety-engineered needles?

FAQs by BC Medical Practitioners

Changes to WorkSafeBC's Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (OHSR) that come into effect on January 1st, 2008, affect all medical practitioners who use hollow bore needles to treat or care for patients. These changes were made in response to the estimated 5,000 needlestick injuries BC healthcare workers sustain each year.



What are these changes?

Any medical procedure that involves the use of hollow bore needles now requires safety engineered needles or needleless systems. These procedures include:

- Withdrawal of body fluids
- Accessing a vein or artery
- Administration of medications or fluids
- Any other procedure — for example, immunizations — involving the potential for an exposure to accidental parenteral contact for which a needleless system or safety-engineered needle system is available

Who do these changes apply to?

The OHSR applies to all workplaces in the province. Included are medical offices, clinics, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and patients' homes where a medical practitioner treats or cares for a person. Since suppliers are also covered by these requirements, needles that are available on the market may change.

Are there any exceptions?

The only two exceptions where conventional needles can still be used for medical procedures are:

1. A safety engineered needle is not commercially available to replace the conventional needle and no alternative systems (such as patches or jet injectors) are available to eliminate the use of the needle.



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2. The use of a safety engineered needle or needleless device is not clinically appropriate because either the medical practitioner or patient would be at increased risk of injury. This determination can be made by educated, trained, and/or experienced persons — such as medical practitioners — who are knowledgeable about the work and hazards involved and the means to control these hazards.

The use of safety engineered needles or needleless devices may require modification of a medical procedure.

What if there are choices?

If there are two or more types of safety engineered needles commercially available that are clinically appropriate for a medical procedure, you must select the device that provides the highest level of protection from accidental parenteral contact. Consider the following:

- Evidence of reduced risk of exposure
- Consideration and review of the different types of engineering controls that are commercially available
- Information provided by manufacturers, independent testing agencies, objective product evaluation, or other reliable sources
- Periodic review to ensure that the devices selected are appropriate based on the most current scientific knowledge of protection from sharps injuries

Will there be further changes?

Yes. On October 1st, 2008, any medical sharp — including sutures, scalpels, and lancets — used to treat or care for a person must be a safety engineered medical sharp. The same criteria and exceptions that apply with hollow bore needles will apply.

Where is more information available?

If you would like more information, please visit our website at www.worksafebc.com for both the regulations and guidelines associated with these changes — Reference OSHR 6.36(1) — or call the Prevention Information Line at 1 888 621-7233 to contact your local WorkSafeBC Occupational Hygiene Officer.



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