

Accidental Needle Stick Injury in Public Places

In the community setting, a needle stick injury is rare and 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 experiences a needle stick injury, there may be anxiety and distress, this is a natural response when thoughts of potential infection with blood borne viruses (BBVs) such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B and C occur. The risk associated with transmission of BBVs through needle stick injuries in community settings is very low.

Treatment:

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. Do not squeeze or rub the area around the puncture instead:
 - cover the site with band aid or similar dressing
 - seek medical advice immediately
 - if able to do so, put the needle in a rigid-walled, puncture resistant container
 - (e.g. a soft drink can) and seal or securely close the container. 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.

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

- local GP
- hospital emergency department.

In many cases, treatment of the needle injury 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 (1800 NEEDLE/1800 633 353) for information and advice, and to obtain a brochure titled What to Do If You Find Used Syringes.

Other resources:

- [Queensland sexual health](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/sexual-health/index.html) (<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/sexual-health/index.html>)

Help and assistance:

For more information on needlestick injury, talk to a:

- local GP
- hospital emergency department.