Health Care Workers Rarely Contract HIV or Hepatitis C at Work

A major academic center found only two cases of on-the-job infections via cuts in a 13-year period.

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Occupational exposure to hepatitis C virus (HCV) and HIV on the part of health care workers rarely leads to infection, Reuters Health reports.

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center examined their own medical database covering 2002 to 2015 to compare rates of health care worker seroconversion of HCV or HIV after occupational exposure to estimates of infection rates made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). According to the CDC, the average rates of infection following occupational exposure to HCV and HIV are 1.8 percent and 0.09 percent, respectively.

The researchers published their findings in two reports in the American Journal of Infection Control.

The study authors looked at 1,361 cases of occupational exposure to HCV. Sixty-five percent of the exposures were caused by injuries to the skin, and 33.7 percent were caused by injuries to the mucous membranes. A total of 63.3 percent of the injuries were to the hand, and 27.6 percent were to the face and neck. A total of 72.7 percent of the exposures were from blood, and 3.4 percent were from blood-containing saliva.

A total of 6.9 percent of the patients who were the source of the HCV exposure were coinfected with HIV; 3.7 percent were coinfected with hepatitis B virus (HBV).

Two health care workers became infected with HCV, for an infection rate of 0.1 percent, well below the CDC estimate. Both cases were the result of blood coming into contact with injuries to the skin.

For occupational exposure to HIV, the researchers looked at 266 cases. A total of 52.6 percent of the exposures were caused by injuries to the skin, and 43.2 percent were caused by injuries to the mucous membranes. A total of 52.6 percent of the injuries were to the hand, and 33.5 percent were to the face and neck. A total of 64.3 percent of the cases involved blood exposure.

A total of 21.1 percent of the health care workers received post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

None of the health care workers contracted HIV.

To read the Medscape article, click here (free registration with the site is required).

To read the study abstract on HIV, click here.

To read the study abstract on HCV, click here.

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