

Medical News

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Needlestick Transmission of Hepatitis C to Hospital Staff

The availability of tests to detect antibody to hepatitis C virus (HCV) has led to questions about the transmissibility of HCV by needlestick to hospital staff, the role of testing for the virus in this setting, and the value of administering immune serum globulin to exposed workers.

Kiyosawa and colleagues in Matsumoto, Japan, studied 357 needlestick accidents in 349 employees of Shinsu University Hospital that occurred between 1981 and 1989. Serum was obtained from sources at baseline and from recipients at baseline, every two to four weeks for at least six months. Serum was screened for antibody to HCV by the Ortho HCV Antibody ELISA Test System, with confirmation by the Ortho recombinant immunoblot assay (RIBA). A diagnosis of hepatitis C required development of hepatitis (i.e., increased serum concentration of transaminases) and anti-HCV seroconversion.

No anti-HCV was found at baseline in 196 staff involved in 200 needlestick accidents. In 110 (55%) or 200 accidents, the donor was anti-HCV-positive. Acute hepatitis C developed in three of 110 anti-HCV negative staff who were exposed to needlesticks involving anti-HIV-positive persons (2.7%, confidence interval = 0.6%-8%). Hepatitis developed in an additional two patients, but they had no serologic evidence of hepatitis A, B, or C, or an infection with cytomega-

lovirus or Epstein-Barr virus. No anti-HCV seroconversions occurred in the absence of increased serum transaminase concentrations. Anti-HCV seroconversion was not seen during five years of observation in 53 initially seronegative healthcare workers who did not sustain needlestick injuries.

From *Ann Intern Med.* 1991;115:367-369. Reported in *Infectious Disease Alert.* 1991;11:22-23.

Hazardous Material Pocket Guide Available

A pocket guide designed to help healthcare workers safely handle hazardous material is now available.

Right to Know Pocket Guide for Health Care Personnel is an 88-page training booklet created to address the specific informational training requirements of two Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations regarding the use of hazardous materials in the workplace. The Hazard Communication Standard was originally enacted in 1985 and requires all employers to train their staff about potential hazards from material they are exposed to at work. The Occupational Exposures to Hazardous Chemicals in Laboratories Standard that took effect in May 1990 details the requirements of both standards