

The aim of **risk assessments** is to eliminate, reduce or control the risk to patients and staff members associated with a procedure or activity. **Standard operating procedures (SOPs)** document safe systems of work.

As new infectious diseases emerge, SOPs must be revised to look for activities that can pose a risk to patients and health workers; for example, vision testing, refraction, slit lamp examination, and funduscopy, to name just a few examples. SOPs should be reviewed and audited regularly.

Management is also responsible for creating robust systems that are well documented (e.g., posters in the staff room or in corridors) so that everyone knows how to respond to situations such as:

- Needle-stick injuries
- Accidental spillage, and harmful exposure to, chemicals
- Health care associated infections
- Near-misses.

Injury and incident reporting is time sensitive and often requires immediate action, so staff members must know where and how to report these. It is also the responsibility of management to ensure there is mechanism in place for prevention (e.g., availability of safety boxes for disposal of sharps in every section of the facility) and compensation in case injuries occur, as per the local guidelines.

Training

It is important to offer regular training for staff members on how they can keep themselves safe. Take care to train all staff members, not just health care workers. For example, cleaning personnel and external contractors also need to be familiar with how infection spreads, how they may need to protect themselves, and what they should report. Recruiting staff champions to model good practice is a recognised approach to encourage uptake and compliance.

References

- 1 WHO. 17 September 2020. Keep health workers safe to keep patients safe. <https://www.who.int/news/item/17-09-2020-keep-health-workers-safe-to-keep-patients-safe-who>
- 2 Centres for Disease Control. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 1997;46(RR-18):1-42. bit.ly/CDCimm
- 3 Vashist P, Senjam SS, Gupta V, Manna S, Agrawal S, Gupta N, et al. Community eye-health and vision center guidelines during COVID-19 pandemic in India. Indian J Ophthalmol. 2020;68:1306-11.

Practical tips for keeping safe at work



Heather Machin

Project Officer:
Lions Eye
Tissue
Donation
Service, Centre
for Eye
Research
Australia,
Melbourne,
Australia.

Manual handling

Always look after your body when you are at work. This means you must be careful when you are lifting or moving an object (including a patient) and/or making repetitive movements. Here are some tips.

- Store heavier items at an appropriate height above the ground i.e. not on a high shelf or a very low shelf, which can make it unsafe for users.
- Test a load to see if it is light enough before you attempt to lift or move it.
- Always ask for help if you must move or lift an object that is heavy or difficult.
- Position yourself close to the object you want to move as this will make it easier to move.
- Wear body braces (if available), such as lifting belts.
- Do not arch your back as you move objects. Keep it straight
- Push rather than pull an item, as pushing takes less effort than pulling.
- To pick something up, bend your legs and use your stomach (core muscles) and legs to lift and push up – avoid using your back.
- Ensure you have good visibility, without adopting awkward positions, during these activities.

Avoid repetition injury

This happens when you keep doing the same thing, in the same position, for extended periods of time; for example, people in an office sitting at a desk and typing. The key is to prevent these movements leading to strains, aches and, in some instances, severe pain. Here are some suggestions on how to prevent repetition injury:

- Take regular breaks
- Move around (stretch your limbs) between tasks – take advantage of small breaks.
- Keep repetitive motions to a minimum. Making even slight alterations to repetitive tasks can reduce the risk of injury.
- Adjust your workstation to fit the task and your individual needs (e.g., change its height)



RACHEL PALMER/SIGHTSAVERS

Use correct manual handling techniques to protect your back at work. MALAWI

Prevent needle stick injury

Health care workers are at risk of needle stick injury and it is important to adopt safe needle-handling practices. If you get a needle stick injury you need to immediately notify your manager and follow your hospital policy for needle-stick injuries and post-exposure prophylaxis against infection.

Here are some recommendations for prevention of needle-stick injury:

- Never re-cap a needle.
- Never take a used needle from the hand of another person. Instead, ask the person to place the sharp item into a needle container where it can be seen clearly.
- If you are the scrub nurse, never pass a needle or sharp blade to a surgeon when they are distracted, as it might harm them. Make sure you inform them that you are handing them the item so they can be alert and can safely take the item from you.
- Handle blades with a special forceps that is strong enough to grasp the blade for placement onto and off the handle's shaft. Never use fingers.
- Only fill a sharps container to the fill line (two-thirds full).
- Never grab or stick your hand inside any bowl or container without looking first. Sharp items (i.e. suture-needles) may have been accidentally left inside.

.....
Adapted from
Machin H.
Protecting
yourself at work.
Comm Eye
Health Vol. 28
No. 90
2015;28-29.
.....