

Tip of the Month

Countdown to Safety

Your role in healthcare is invaluable. But are you doing all you should to protect your health and well-being in the workplace? To reduce your risk of injury and ensure that you are able to draw another day, review the Collector's Countdown to Safety and see how you measure up.

- 10. I participate in the annual evaluation of sharps safety devices.** Providing feedback on the ease of use and characteristics of sharps safety devices is important. It's also an OSHA requirement. As a frontline user, your input helps guide management's selection of the most appropriate and safest equipment available on the market for the blood collection tasks you perform.
- 9. I always wear the personal protective equipment my employer has designated for a given task.** It's called "personal protective equipment" for a reason. If you consider wearing gloves or a lab coat an inconvenience, consider the inconvenience of a liver transplant or other consequence of being infected with a bloodborne pathogen.
- 8. I use a safety transfer device for tube filling when performing syringe draws.** Sure, it takes a few extra seconds to remove and discard the needle attached to the syringe and apply a safety transfer device. But when you fill tubes with the same needle used to perform the venipuncture, you're gambling with an accidental needlestick. With your health and peace of mind at stake, don't exchange safety for the sake of expediency.
- 7. I make sure a sharps container is available at the point of use and is not overfilled.** When a sharps container is not within reach during blood collection, it prevents the immediate safe disposal of the contaminated sharp, a delay that is responsible for 62 percent of all accidental needlesticks. When containers are used beyond their fill capacity, collectors are at risk for injury and the facility an OSHA citation.
- 6. I follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding the proper use of safety needles and puncture devices.** Proper use includes not altering, disabling, or removing the device's safety feature, immediate activation upon completion of the draw, and disposing of tube holder assemblies as a single unit.
- 5. I never position my finger in front of the needle when anchoring a vein.** What is the shortest distance between you and a needlestick? It can be mere inches or centimeters when your index finger is placed in front of the needle during venous access. Whatever your preferred system of measurement, the space between needle and flesh can be closed in an instant should the patient unexpectedly flinch or jump during the draw. Anchor from below only.
- 4. I consistently practice hand hygiene.** Hand hygiene is not just about preventing the spread of infection patient-to-patient. This cornerstone of infection control protects both patient and collector from the transmission of pathogens. If you're too busy to properly cleanse your hands between patients, then you're too busy.
- 3. I request the assistance of a parent, guardian, or coworker when drawing from patients who may be less than fully cooperative (e.g., pediatric, cognitively impaired patients).** Some patients can be unpredictable in their response to phlebotomy procedures. Don't go it alone in the hopes that all will go well. Request assistance any time impulsive or volatile behavior can be reasonably anticipated.
- 2. I report safety hazards and violations when encountered.** When it comes to unsafe behaviors and work practices, adopt the attitude of a neighborhood watch. There's safety in numbers. Especially when it's everyone's responsibility to help ensure a safe work environment. That means alerting your superiors to any situation that could place you or others in harm's way.
- 1. I am familiar with my facility's Exposure Control Plan and know the steps to take in the event of an occupational exposure.** The unthinkable happens... you've been stuck with a contaminated needle. Now what? Don't wait for "what if" to become "what now" to determine your course of action. Review your facility's protocol for reporting and responding to an occupational exposure and rehearse those actions regularly. It may be the most important information you'll never have to use.