

Infectious Human Tissues and Waste

Standard PCI.05.00

The hospital implements processes for proper disposal of waste, proper management of human tissues, and safe handling and disposal of sharps and needles.

Intent of PCI.05.00

Hospitals produce considerable waste each day. Frequently that waste is or could be infectious. Thus, the proper disposal of waste, proper management of human tissues, and safe handling and disposal of sharps and needles contribute to the reduction of infection risk in the hospital. This is true for the disposal of body fluids and materials contaminated with body fluids, the disposal of blood and blood components, and the disposal or destruction of pathological waste. Human tissues, organs, and body parts require careful and respectful management to reduce the risk of infections during handling, transporting, and processing.

The hospital must also prevent infectious waste from contaminating the environment and transmitting infection outside of the hospital. Materials contaminated with body fluids, blood and blood components, and pathological waste create infection risks for staff handling and disposing of them.

One of the dangers of needlestick and sharps injuries is the possible transmission of bloodborne diseases. Improper handling and disposal of sharps and needles present a major staff safety hazard. Work practices influence the risk of injury and potential exposure to disease. Identifying and implementing evidence-based practices to reduce the risk of injury from sharps ensures that exposure to such injuries is minimal. Hospitals need to provide staff with education related to safe handling and management of sharps and needles.

Proper disposal of needles and sharps also reduces the risk of injury and exposure. Proper disposal includes the use of containers that are closable, puncture-proof, and leakproof on the sides and the bottom. Containers should be easily accessible to staff and should not be overfilled. In addition, containers must be labeled to warn of the potential injury hazard and stored to prevent the sharps from spilling out of the container.

Improper disposal of discarded needles, scalpels, and other sharps can pose a health risk to the public and to those who work in waste management. The disposal of sharps containers in the ocean or in general waste, for example, can pose risks to the public if the containers break open. Hospitals must dispose of sharps and needles safely or contract with organizations that ensure the proper disposal of medical waste containers in accordance with laws and regulations.

The hospital implements a policy that adequately addresses all steps in the process, including identifying the proper type and use of containers, the disposal of the containers, and the surveillance of the process of disposal.

There are special considerations related to the respectful and safe handling of the deceased and of human body parts. Mortuaries are constructed in a way that ensures the security of the bodies and body parts and the safety of the staff handling them. Hospital leaders consult local and national laws and regulations and consider local cultures and customs when designing the hospital mortuary. Additional considerations include how the chain of custody is ensured for bodies, body parts, and any specimens removed for testing; how staff are notified of a known or suspected infection; and how the bodies are preserved to prevent potential cross contamination. For example, a proper chain of custody provides that the hospital has a means of safeguarding the body or body parts until they are no longer under the jurisdiction of the hospital and documentation thereof. The mortuary is also maintained at a temperature and humidity that ensures proper storage. Staff have access to personal protective equipment, hand-cleaning stations, and necessary cleaning agents throughout the mortuary and are trained in respectful, safe handling procedures.

Measurable Elements of PCI.05.00

1. The hospital implements practices to reduce the risk of infection from handling and disposal of infectious waste, blood and blood components, body fluids, and body tissues. (*See also* FMS.05.00, ME 2)
2. The hospital identifies and implements practices to reduce the risk of injury and infection from the handling and management of sharps and needles.
3. Sharps and needles are collected in dedicated, closable, puncture-proof, leakproof containers that are not reused.
4. The hospital disposes of sharps and needles safely or contracts with vendors that ensure the proper disposal of sharps containers in dedicated hazardous waste sites or as determined by national laws and regulations.
5. The mortuary and postmortem area operate in a manner that adheres to laws, regulations, and local cultures/customs and is managed in a manner that minimizes the risk of transmitting infections.
6. Staff are trained in preventing cross contamination, maintaining chain of custody when needed, and respectful, safe handling procedures in postmortem areas.
7. © The hospital has a written policy to direct chain of custody for all bodies and body parts handled by pathology, mortuary, and other postmortem areas.

Standard PCI.05.01

The hospital reduces the risk of infections associated with exposure to blood, body fluids, and other potentially infectious materials.

Intent of PCI.05.01

Patients, visitors, staff, and health care practitioners are at risk for exposures to bloodborne pathogens while present in the hospital, or while performing their job duties in the hospital. Exposures to potential bloodborne pathogens occur when a health care practitioner, staff member, patient, or visitor comes into contact with another person's blood or body fluid through nonintact skin, mucus membranes, eyes, nose, or mouth. Various pathogens, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV, can be transmitted through blood or body fluid exposure. Body fluids include cerebrospinal, synovial, pleural, peritoneal, pericardial, seminal, and amniotic fluid. Other body fluids that do not carry a risk of bloodborne pathogen transmission unless visibly contaminated with blood include breast milk, sputum, nasal secretions, saliva, sweat, tears, urine, feces, and emesis; exposures to these fluids generally do not need to be reported or tracked unless visibly contaminated with blood or if required by local or national laws and regulations or hospital policy. Proper use of personal protective equipment appropriate to the task can significantly decrease the likelihood of an exposure. The hospital must provide adequate resources such as appropriate personal protective equipment, and safety devices, when possible, for staff who may come into contact with blood and body fluids while performing their job duties.

The hospital establishes a process for handling staff, patient, and visitor blood and body fluid exposures. The process includes to whom the incident should be reported. This process may vary depending on the time of day or day of week; however, staff must be able to report exposure incidents at any time they occur. The process includes reporting the incident to the direct supervisor and to employee health or the emergency department. This ensures timely documentation of and response to the incident. The process also identifies the action requirements for responding following blood or body fluid exposure. These actions follow local and national laws, as well as recommendations and guidelines from infection control organizations, and include how to clean and/or disinfect the exposed area, what testing for bloodborne illnesses must occur, and whether to initiate postexposure prophylaxis therapy. This process also includes steps for notifying any patient involved in the exposure, when appropriate, and provisions for testing involved patients for bloodborne infections separate from the patient's care.