



Mitigating Employee Exposure to Infectious Materials

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Municipalities work hard to keep their parks clean and vibrant. At times, the nature of the tasks needed to maintain these parks create hazardous conditions for their employees. This article illustrates a claim caused by an emerging trend in Connecticut, provides helpful tips to mitigate losses and highlights the importance of timely claim reporting.

SCENARIO

A Crew Leader for the Parks and Recreation department of a CIRMA Member town was tasked with emptying all of the Town's parks trash receptacles. While picking up a trash bag, the employee placed his hand on the underside of the bag to lift it into the hopper. At this point, he felt a sharp pain on his finger. After inspecting his finger, the employee did not see any blood on his hand. Upon further inspection, he noticed a needle protruding from the bag. The employee decided to continue with his work and wait to report the incident to his supervisor until the end of the day. After being notified, the Crew Leader's supervisor immediately referred him to the Town's Initial Care Provider (ICP) for an examination. The supervisor subsequently completed a First Report of Occupational Injury or Illness and submitted it to CIRMA. The employee went to the Town's ICP where initial blood work was taken and subsequent appointments were made. The blood work revealed that the employee was exposed to Hepatitis B and C. Over the course of the next six months, the employee attended follow-up visits and underwent medical procedures in order to mitigate any long-term health complications. He did not have any work restrictions, however, needed to attend doctors' appointments during work hours thus, negatively impacting productivity in the department and resulting in overtime expenses.

INVESTIGATION AND DAMAGES

The claim investigation process revealed that the employee made the decision to continue working instead of reporting the incident because there was no bleeding observed around the puncture wound.

The Supervisor's Accident Review Report revealed the following:

- The employee's failure to notify his supervisor immediately resulted in prolonged exposure.
- Because the employee waited until the end of the day to notify his supervisor, neither the employee nor the supervisor were able to locate the needle. This eliminated the ability to preserve the needle and test it for possible contaminants.

- The employee was wearing leather gloves instead of medical gloves. However, the supervisor determined that medical gloves would not have prevented the incident or mitigated the severity of the injury.

CIRMA is 100% responsible for this work-related incident. The total direct cost of this claim, including medical expenses, equaled **\$8,565**. It is estimated that the indirect costs associated with this claim, including the lost time from work and overtime expenses required to backfill the position while the employee was receiving testing and treatment, could be as much as twice the direct costs for this claim. Therefore, the total cost of risk for this incident was **approximately \$25,500**.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Reporting Incidents and Training.** Continue to train staff on the protocol for reporting Workers' Compensation claims. Employees who could be exposed to hazardous or infectious material, should also be trained on how to respond.
- **Department Leadership.** Promote a culture of accountability and accessibility to help employees feel comfortable reporting incidents/injuries and reinforce the importance of reporting them immediately. Timely claim reporting helps save members time and money and helps get injured employees the care they need.
- **Know What to Do If An Employee Sustains a Sharps Injury.** Employees who are injured should:
 - Allow the wound to gently bleed, ideally holding it under running water.
 - Wash the wound using running water and plenty of soap; do not scrub the wound.
 - Refrain from sucking the wound.
 - Dry the wound and cover it with a waterproof plaster or dressing.
 - Seek urgent medical advice as effective prophylaxis are available.
 - Report the injury right away.