

Shared Tagging Guns and Bloodborne Disease Risk

Handheld tagging guns, also known as swiftachers or swift-taggers, are used in retail to attach price tags or other tags to clothing, accessories, and household goods. Tagging guns have a hollow needle to penetrate material and to deliver a plastic thread fastener, which attaches the paper tag to the retail item. Injuries from the needle (“needlesticks”) are common in retail workers who use tagging guns. *Therefore, when tagging guns are shared, workers may be exposed to pathogens (disease causing agents such as viruses or bacteria) that are spread through blood (“bloodborne infections”).*

**HEALTH
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Bloodborne infections are caused by pathogens that are spread through contact with an infected person’s blood. Bloodborne infections include **hepatitis B**, **hepatitis C**, and **human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)**. Although these are serious infections, treatment is available if testing shows that you are infected. There is also a vaccine available that you can take to prevent hepatitis B infection.

To prevent bloodborne pathogen exposure while using a handheld tagging gun

EMPLOYERS SHOULD:

- ▶ Issue individual tagging guns to workers that are labeled with the worker’s name.
- ▶ Provide a locker or other secure space for workers to store their tagging guns when not using them.
- ▶ Provide an appropriate biohazard waste container for disposal of used needles.
- ▶ Instruct workers to report needlestick injuries to their supervisor.
- ▶ Provide worker training in the safe use of tagging guns.
- ▶ Provide worker training about bloodborne pathogens.
- ▶ Be familiar with the Cal/OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen Standard.
- ▶ Have an Injury and Illness Prevention Program.

WORKERS SHOULD:

- ▶ Avoid sharing their tagging gun with coworkers.
- ▶ Label tagging gun with their name.
- ▶ Store their tagging gun in a secure space when not using it.
- ▶ Handle only their own tagging gun needles.
- ▶ Dispose of their own used needles in an appropriate red biohazard waste container.

If a tagging gun must be shared, workers should:

- ▶ Never lend a tagging gun to a coworker with a needle loaded.
- ▶ Always make sure the prior user removes the used needle if a tagging gun is borrowed.
- ▶ Report tagging gun injuries to their supervisor immediately.

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HAZARD EVALUATION SYSTEM & INFORMATION SERVICE
California Department of Public Health
Occupational Health Branch
850 Marina Bay Parkway, Building P, 3rd Floor, Richmond, CA 94804
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If you have a needlestick injury while using a handheld tagging gun that MAY HAVE BEEN SHARED...*

EMPLOYERS SHOULD:

- ▶ Take the worker's report seriously, and respond immediately:
- ▶ Provide workers with the contact information for their employer-sponsored occupational health clinic.
- ▶ Record the incident in the company's worker injury log.
- ▶ Be prepared by identifying in advance an employer-sponsored occupational health clinic where workers can receive post-exposure assessment.

WORKERS SHOULD:

- ▶ Treat the injury by washing with soap and water.
- ▶ Very carefully remove the needle from the tagging gun (use hand protection if available) and dispose in a red biohazard waste container. **Remember**—a shared needle could pose a bloodborne pathogens risk.
- ▶ Report the injury to your supervisor.
- ▶ **Visit your employer-sponsored occupational health clinic immediately (preferably within 24 hours).**

* What to do if you have a needlestick injury using a tagging gun that is *not* shared:

- ▶ **Treat the injury** by washing with soap and water.
- ▶ **Remove the needle** and dispose in a red biohazard waste container.

Biohazard waste containers are marked with this symbol:



HOW TO REDUCE NEEDLESTICK INJURIES

Substitution: When possible, use safer equipment such as a looping gun or other device that does not have a needle.

Take your time: Workers reported that needlesticks occur more frequently when they are rushing or multi-tasking. Employers should allow their workers plenty of time to complete their tagging assignment.

Hand protection: Using hand protection such as a specially designed leather glove may reduce the severity of injury from a needlestick. Specialty gloves are usually available from suppliers that sell tagging guns. **Gloves can be used in addition to other protections, but must not be used instead of other protections.**

What happens after I contact the occupational health clinic or other health care provider?

- ▶ Your injury and potential exposure to bloodborne pathogens will be assessed.
- ▶ You will be offered testing for hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV); however, you can refuse any of the individual tests.
- ▶ Your medical provider will repeat tests for hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) after 6 months has passed from the initial injury as it may take that long for infection to be detected.
- ▶ You may be offered medication to help prevent the onset of hepatitis B or HIV, depending on your individual exposure.
- ▶ You may be offered vaccination for hepatitis B.
- ▶ Your medical provider will prepare a written report of your assessment and send this to your employer. This report will verify that you were given medical counseling and offered the hepatitis B vaccine, if indicated. This report SHOULD NOT contain individual test results.
- ▶ Your medical provider may be unaware of the bloodborne pathogens risk associated with tagging gun use. For more information on how to treat needlestick injuries your medical provider can contact:

The National Clinicians' Post-Exposure
Prophylaxis Hotline
1-888-448-4911
24 hours / 7 days a week

What regulations protect workers from exposure to bloodborne pathogens on the job?

Cal/OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard: This standard applies to workplaces where occupational exposure to blood or infectious materials is anticipated to occur (California Code of Regulations Title 8, Section 5193 (8 CCR 5193); www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5193.html). If workers are potentially exposed to blood through unsafe use (for example—shared use) of tagging guns in your workplace, some of the provisions of this standard may apply.

Other regulations that help to protect workers

Injury and Illness Prevention Program: Every California employer must have an effective, written Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP) that identifies a person with the authority and responsibility to run the program (8 CCR 3203, www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3203.html). The IIPP must include methods for identifying workplace hazards, correcting hazards quickly, providing health and safety training at specified times, communicating clearly with all employees about health and safety matters (including safe ways for employees to tell the employer about the hazards), and record-keeping to document the steps taken to comply with the IIPP.

Access to Medical and Exposure Records: You have the right to see and copy your own medical records, including any records about your counseling or vaccination related to a needlestick (8 CCR 3204; www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3204.html). These records are important in determining whether your health has been affected by your work. Employers who have such records must keep them and make them available to you for at least 30 years after the end of your employment. In the case of bloodborne pathogens exposure, your individual medical results will not be provided to your employer.

WHERE TO GET HELP

- ▶ **California Department of Public Health, Hazard Evaluation System and Information Service (HESIS)** answers questions about workplace hazards and has many free publications available.

For information on workplace hazards: (866) 282-5516. Please leave a message and your call will be returned.

For HESIS Publications: (866) 627-1586. Call, or visit our website www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/HESIS, or write to:

HESIS
Occupational Health Branch
850 Marina Bay Parkway
Building P, 3rd Floor
Richmond, CA 94804

- ▶ **California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA)** investigates workers' complaints, makes enforcement inspections, and answers questions about workplace health and safety regulations. Workers' identities are kept confidential. Contact the Cal/OSHA Enforcement District office nearest to your workplace. Offices are listed in the blue government section near the front of the phone book, under "State Government / Industrial Relations / Occupational Safety and Health / Enforcement," or visit their website at: www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH/districtoffices.htm.

- ▶ **Cal/OSHA Consultation Service** helps employers who want free, non-enforcement help to evaluate the workplace and improve the health and safety conditions. Employers can call **(800) 963-9424**.

- ▶ **Occupational health clinics** can be found at:

- University of California (UC), San Francisco/ SFGH Occupational and Environmental Medicine Clinic: **(415) 885-7580**.
- UC Davis Occupational and Environmental Medicine Clinic: **(530) 754-7635**.
- UC Irvine Center for Occupational and Environmental Health: **(949) 824-8641**.
- UC San Diego Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine Clinic: **(619) 471-9210**.

- ▶ **Other resources** for employees may include your supervisor, your union, your company health and safety officer, your doctor, or your company doctor.

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California Relay Service: 711.



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Tagging Guns