



Importance of Treating Minor Injuries

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory Lessons Learned

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Concern Statement: Employees who do not seek proper medical attention for minor injuries may be exacerbating their injuries.

Applicable to: All LBNL personnel

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Incidents

During the past five months, three LBNL employees required additional medical treatment for minor injuries that were not cleansed and treated properly. A graduate student embedded her hand with glass from a laboratory flask that broke. The accident occurred during the weekend when the Campus medical center was closed. The employee and a co-worker proceeded to remove the glass and attempted to clean the wound themselves. The employee did not make a follow-up appointment with the medical center. Eleven days later, the wound had become seriously infected, and the employee at that time went to seek medical attention. She was subsequently hospitalized overnight for observation and treatment of the infection.

Another student employee received 5-6 needle punctures to his arm while adjusting a colony picker with 96 needles. The employee washed off the arm and continued to work. The next morning, the employee woke up with a numb and aching right arm and went to the Alta Bates emergency room. The employee was treated with antibiotics and a tetanus booster shot.

A third employee suffered a wire puncture wound to his thumb while cleaning a welding gun. The employee delayed treatment of the injury for five days. When he did report to Health Services with the infected thumb, he was referred to an outside clinic for more intensive treatment.

In addition to these three cases, last year an employee cut his finger on a sheet metal edge of a van. The employee only washed his hand with soap and water, but he did not seek medical attention. Five days later, the finger became infected and swollen to the point where the employee tried to lance the infection himself. The employee went Health Services three days later where he was referred to an outside clinic. In a worse case scenario about ten years ago, an employee lost a portion of a finger due to a minor cut that became infected.

Cause

In all cases, the employees did not seek proper medical attention. The employees did not report the injuries to medical professionals, and instead, they took it upon themselves to treat the injuries. Minor injuries that were not properly treated resulted in all of the employees receiving serious infections. The infections were all avoidable.

Recommended Actions

- ❑ Laboratory employees and supervisors are reminded of the requirement to report all injuries to Health Services, no matter how small.
- ❑ Minor cuts like the ones above will be treated as First Aid cases. They will be cleansed and swabbed with antibacterial agents, and in appropriate case, a tetanus booster shot will be provided as a precautionary measure. This will prevent an infection, eliminate your pain and suffering, and it will keep your Division's recordable injury rate low.

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Further Information

Any questions regarding these incidents or the lessons learned may be directed to Dr. Peter Lichty (x6267) and Matt Kotowski (x6428).

For other lessons learned, go to: http://www.lbl.gov/ehs/lessons_learned