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Help! We've had an Exposure

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Help! We've had an Exposure

Best Practices for Post-Exposure Protocol in the Dental Office

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Preparation is key when (not if) your office has an exposure. If you've worked in dentistry for any amount of time, you probably know someone who has had an injury in the office. I'm guessing that injury didn't happen at the slowest time of day or at a time convenient for the team. I'd also guess there was quite a bit of panic as your team tried to move patients around, figure out where all the paperwork was, and talk to the patient about going to the clinic with you. If any of this sounds familiar, you likely understand the importance of having protocols and systems in place ahead of time to help handle exposure incidents in your office.

There are many things to consider when creating an exposure control plan in your dental office. Creating written documents and protocols is more than checking the box on your legal requirements but allows your team to think through the systems in your practice and where the highest potential for injury exists. Implementing preventive measures such as safer needle devices, adequate sharps containers in more convenient locations for safer disposal, proper PPE during sterilization, and utilizing an ultrasonic instrument cleaner can all help prevent injuries in your practice. All these items should be outlined in your exposure control plan for effective team communication and training of new employees.

Despite our best preventive efforts and planning, exposure incidents still happen. Being prepared for an incident requires organization and planning. A "Grab & Go" packet is a centralized location with all the necessary post-exposure documentation that can be found quickly in the event of an incident and informs the employee and the patient of next steps. Having information readily available about the nearest clinic that can properly handle an occupational bloodborne pathogen exposure, information for the patient about the importance of the patient accompanying the employee to the clinic, and post exposure prophylaxis recommendations will help team members to stay calm and act quickly.

This March, MDDS kicks-off its OSHA Webinar Series to take a deeper dive into some common questions from dental practices. The first webinar in the series, "Best Practices for Post-Exposure Protocol in the Dental Office" will discuss how to prepare for exposure incidents and what to do when an incident occurs in your office. Whether your team has recently dealt with an exposure incident and you're looking for ways to improve your processes, or if you want to prepare to ensure these incidents are handled properly in the future, this webinar is for you. Future webinars will focus on common OSHA & infection control violations, dental unit waterlines and sterilization process errors.

The OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard requires dental employers offer annual training for all employees who are at risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens. However, teams must take the information about exposure control, prevention, and preparation and customize it to their practice. Taking these general concepts and applying them in your practice setting can sometimes be challenging on top of managing all the other things your practice needs to accomplish. Having dedicated team members who are responsible for the various aspects of safety and allowing them time and resources to put systems in place, is critical for creating a safety culture. While this webinar, nor any combination of these webinars, meets the annual training requirements outlined in the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard, we will be able to dig into specific compliance topics that continue to be a struggle for dental offices.

Read more about OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard and annual training requirements at cdaonline.org. Annual OSHA bloodborne pathogens training must be offered by the employer at no cost to the employee, during working hours, taught by a qualified expert, in a live and interactive format that allows for questions to be asked of the instructor in real time and must cover specific topics outlined in the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ms. Alyssa Aberle is certified in dental infection prevention and control and works with dental teams to provide annual OSHA and infection control training, audit preparation, and consulting to help implement better infection prevention practices for their patients. Ms. Aberle's background as the Infection Control Coordinator for a large multi-site community health center gives her expertise in implementing systems to efficiently provide safe care.