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Needlestick Injuries Among Medical Students: Incidence and Implications.

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PURPOSE: To determine the incidence of needlestick injuries in medical school and to examine the behaviors associated with reporting injuries to an occupational health office. Medical students have underdeveloped surgical skills and are at high risk of needlestick injuries.

METHOD: Recent medical school graduates enrolled in a surgery residency at 17 medical centers were surveyed regarding needlestick injuries that they sustained during medical school. The survey asked about the circumstances and cause of injury and postinjury reporting.

RESULTS: Of 699 respondents, 415 (59%) reported having sustained a needlestick injury as a medical student; the median number of injuries per injured respondent was 2 (interquartile range: 1–2). Respondents who sustained a needlestick injury in medical school were more likely to sustain a needlestick injury during residency than those who did not experience a needlestick injury in medical school (odds ratio [OR]: 2.57; 95% CI: 1.84, 3.58). Of 89 residents who sustained their most recent needlestick injury during medical school, 42 (47%) did not report their injury to an employee health office.

CONCLUSIONS: Needlestick injuries and underreporting of these injuries are common among medical students and place them at risk for hepatitis and human immunodeficiency virus. Strategies aimed at improving reporting systems and creating a culture of reporting should be implemented by medical centers.