

Infection Control Q&A

Question: Is it OK to use the same syringe to give an intramuscular (IM) or intravenous (IV) injection to more than one patient if I change the needle between patients and I don't draw back before injecting?

Answer: NO. A small amount of blood can flow into the needle and syringe even when only positive pressure is applied outward. The syringe and needle are contaminated and must be discarded.

Question: If I used a syringe only to infuse medications into an IV tubing port that is several feet away from the patient's IV catheter site, is it OK to use the same syringe for another patient?

Answer: NO. Everything from the medication bag to the patient's catheter is a single interconnected unit.

- Separation from the patient's IV by distance, gravity, and/or positive infusion pressure does not ensure that small amounts of blood are not present in these supplies
- A syringe that intersects through ports in the IV tubing or bags also becomes contaminated and cannot be used for another patient.

Question: Can I reuse a syringe during a procedure for a patient who requires additional medication as long as the vial will not be used for another patient?

Answer: It is preferable to always use a new sterile syringe to withdraw medications, even if the medication will be used only for one patient. This provides an extra layer of protection for patients and is encouraged.

Question: Why can't I just visually inspect syringes to determine whether they are contaminated or can be used again?

Answer: Pathogens, including hepatitis C virus (HCV), hepatitis B virus (HBV), and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) can be present in sufficient quantities to produce infection in the absence of visible blood.

Similarly, bacteria and other microbes can be present without clouding or other visible evidence of contamination.

Just because you don't see blood or other material in a used syringe or IV tubing, e.g., does not mean the item is free from potentially infectious agents.

All used injection supplies and materials are potentially contaminated and should be discarded.

For DHQP Inquiries (inquiries about safe injection practices), call (800) 311-3435, option 1 or e-mail hip@cdc.gov.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta.