

Preventing reuse of devices used for blood glucose monitoring

Issue:

Lancets, fingerstick devices, and glucometers (blood glucose meters) designed for use by a single patient should never be used for more than one patient. Many health care providers are under the mistaken belief that changing the lancet needle or cleaning the fingerstick device between uses prevents cross-contamination; it does not. Also, wiping a glucometer with alcohol after use is not adequate to prevent cross-contamination. If a glucometer is approved by the manufacturer for reuse and is to be used on multiple patients, it must be cleaned and disinfected after each use, per the manufacturer's instructions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prohibit the reuse of lancets, fingerstick devices, and manufacturer-stated single-patient-use blood glucose meters, on multiple patients due to the risk of transmitting bloodborne pathogens, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV viruses.

According to the CDC, outbreaks of hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection associated with blood glucose monitoring have been identified with increasing regularity, particularly in health care settings in which patients require assistance with monitoring blood glucose.¹ In the last 10 years, there have been at least 15 outbreaks of HBV infection associated with providers failing to follow basic principles of infection control when assisting with blood glucose monitoring.¹

Health care settings where patients may require assistance with blood glucose monitoring include hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities.¹ In addition, the use of single-use devices on multiple patients has been identified as particularly problematic in home care settings, where performing fingersticks for glucose monitoring is routine.²

Joint Commission surveyors have been instructed to evaluate organizations for infection control practices that are consistent with nationally-recognized guidelines, guidance provided by CMS, and manufacturer's instructions for use.²

Safety Actions to Consider:

The Joint Commission provides the following guidance for health care organizations to support the safe monitoring of blood glucose:²

- Ensure that lancets or fingerstick devices designed for single patients are not used on multiple patients.
- Develop current, supportive infection prevention and control policies for devices and equipment used for blood glucose monitoring, based on manufacturer's instructions for use.
- Assess adherence to infection control policies and processes for blood glucose monitoring, as well as equipment cleaning and disinfection.
- Provide oversight on the implementation of infection control practices.
- Ensure that glucometers and other waived testing devices used for multiple patients are approved for such use by the manufacturer, and that they are cleaned and disinfected after each test, using a method that is consistent with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Conduct staff orientation, training and competency assessment on waived testing equipment and processes.
- Educate staff about why they are never to use lancets, fingerstick devices, and glucometers (based on manufacturer instructions for use) on multiple patients.

(Cont.)

- Confirm that staff are not using devices or equipment they have personally purchased.
- Provide staff with appropriate products and supplies for cleaning and disinfecting blood glucose monitoring equipment, as stated in the manufacturer instructions for use.

Resources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: "[Infection prevention during blood glucose monitoring and insulin administration.](#)" Infection Safety web page.
2. The Joint Commission. "Stop unsafe practices: Minimizing the risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens when performing waived testing." *The Joint Commission Perspectives*. 2017;37(8):8-9.

Other resources:

The Joint Commission. "Improperly sterilized or HLD equipment — a growing problem." *Quick Safety*. 2017;33.

Note: This is not an all-inclusive list.