
Abstract:

Objective – Occupational exposures to blood and other bodily fluids occur in approximately 5 per 100 persons every year in US hospitals. Since the provision of health care in the deployed environment poses unique challenges to hospital personnel, it is important to characterize the rates of occupational exposures and understand the prevalence of blood-borne pathogens (BBPs) in host nations.

Methods – A retrospective review of public health and laboratory records at a US military trauma center in Afghanistan from October 1, 2010, to March 31, 2012.

Results – A total of 65 occupational exposures were reported, including 47 (72%) percutaneous and 18 (28%) mucocutaneous, with a yearly rate of 8.6 exposures per 100 persons. During 6-month deployment cycles, the majority of exposures (46.2%) occurred in the first 2 months after arrival in Afghanistan. Physicians reported the most exposures (26%), and the operating room (48%) was the most common hospital location. The prevalence of hepatitis B and hepatitis C among local national source patients ( ) was 8.9% and 2.3%, respectively, with no cases of HIV or syphilis detected. In contrast, there were no BBPs detected in coalition source ( ) or exposed ( ) patients.

Conclusions – The characteristics of occupational exposures in this deployed environment were comparable to those of US-based hospitals. Standard practices used to reduce occupational exposures, such as use of personal protective equipment and safety devices, should continue to be prioritized in the deployed setting. Although BBP rates are not well defined in Afghanistan, our results were consistent with those of prior epidemiologic studies.