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OSHA® Occupational Safety and Health Administration | The Joint Commission | NIOSH National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

April 4, 2011

Dear Colleague:

Every day in healthcare settings across America, workers are exposed to hundreds of powerful drugs used for cancer chemotherapy, antiviral treatments, hormone regimens and other therapies. While these drugs are used to relieve and heal patients, many of them present serious hazards to the health and safety of your workers. Some of these drugs have been known to cause cancer, reproductive and developmental problems, allergic reactions, and other adverse effects that can be irreversible even after low-level exposures.

To protect workers as well as patients from harm, precautions should be taken to handle hazardous drugs safely. To help you prioritize your safety and health protocols for the most hazardous drugs –

- NIOSH has recently updated the List of Antineoplastic and Other Hazardous Drugs in Healthcare Settings 2010 (www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-167/pdfs/2010-167.pdf), compiled by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Additional NIOSH information is available at www.niosh.gov.
- The hazardous drug list that has been updated is a part of an earlier NIOSH Alert: Preventing Occupational Exposure to Antineoplastic and Other Hazardous Drugs in Health Care Settings (www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2004-165/pdfs/2004-165.pdf), which provides guidance on protecting healthcare workers from hazardous exposures to these medications in healthcare settings.

We encourage you to address safe drug handling in your institution by (1) committing your management staff to taking a leadership role in worker safety and health and (2) offering opportunities for meaningful employee participation in your efforts to identify and remediate hazards, develop and offer training, and evaluate your injury and illness prevention program for continuous improvement.

You will find more information at NIOSH's Hazardous Drug Exposures in Health Care Workplace Safety and Health Topics webpage at www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hazdrug and at OSHA's Hazardous Drugs Safety and Health Topics webpage at www.osha.gov/SLTC/hazardousdrugs/index.html. Additional OSHA information is available at www.osha.gov.

You may learn more about The Joint Commission at http://www.jointcommission.org.

We hope this information helps you improve worker safety and health in your institution. Making safe handling of hazardous drugs a priority is vital to the integrity and success of our nation's healthcare system. Thank you for your assistance and commitment.

Sincerely,

Dr. David Michaels
Assistant Secretary of Labor
Occupational Safety and
Health Administration

Dr. Paul Schyve
Senior Vice President
The Joint Commission

Dr. John Howard
Director
National Institute for
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