



SAFETY ALERT

Incident Type: Finger lacerated while wiping a scalpel blade

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Incident Description:

An undergraduate researcher was cleaning a scalpel blade when his hand slipped resulting in a laceration to his finger.

The student was holding the scalpel (Photo 1) in his right hand, and a paper towel in his left. As he began to wipe the blade, his hands slipped and the blade lacerated the tip of the middle finger on his left hand. The researcher sought treatment at University Health Services.

Photo 1: A reusable scalpel



Investigation Findings:

- Lab personnel typically clean the scalpel(s) between experiments.
- Sometimes a wet paper towel is laid on the lab bench and the scalpel blade is wiped across the paper towel. In other instances, lab personnel hold a Kimwipe in their hand and use that to clean the blade.
- The experiments require dexterity so cut-resistant gloves are not feasible.

Photo 2: A disposable (single-use) scalpel



Root Causes:

The laceration was caused by the researcher holding onto the cleaning towel.

Instruction was not provided on how to safely clean a scalpel blade.

Recommended Actions:

1. Develop a process outlining a safe method for cleaning a scalpel blade and communicate to lab personnel.
- OR -
Implement the use of disposable scalpels in the laboratory to eliminate the need to clean between experiments. Communicate this change with lab personnel.