

Thank you for your inquiry regarding a September 2016 incident in which a Washington University graduate student accidentally stuck herself with a needle while in a BSL3 laboratory. In 2016, researchers in that lab were conducting basic research related to Chikungunya virus that could serve to develop treatments or a vaccine. The University, in coordination with its Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC), appropriately responded to and investigated this incident, reported it to NIH OSP, followed OSP's recommendations, and implemented safety program enhancements. The graduate student fully recovered from the incident within a few days and has not experienced long-term adverse effects.

As a major research institution, the safety of graduate students and scientists working in BSL3 labs is of paramount importance to us. We continually evaluate our laboratory safety policies, procedures and training materials and look for ways to incorporate new technologies and tools so that our labs remain safe and our students and researchers can continue their critical infectious diseases research. Beginning long before 2016, Washington University's training and policies have required lab personnel to report immediately any overt or potential exposure in BSL3 laboratories, such as needle sticks.

In fact, as part of our continual safety efforts, in Summer 2016, in the months just prior to this needle stick incident, the IBC instructed the University to launch an internal communications campaign specifically to remind lab researchers about the importance of sharps safety and of promptly reporting accidental needle sticks. (Note: this instruction, as well as most discussions of specific injury/illness reports are too granular to be captured in the IBC minutes.) Coincidentally, that campaign was launching the same week as this BSL3 needle stick incident.

In addition to this communications campaign, the University, in consultation with the IBC, took several additional actions in response to the Sept 2016 incident including:

- Re-education by the BSL3 lab PI of all lab members, including the graduate student, regarding the importance of immediately reporting all needle sticks;
- Sending university notices to all lab workers (including BSL3 lab workers) about immediately reporting needle sticks;
- Adding additional content to the annual, mandatory Environmental Health & Safety laboratory safety training program about reporting needle sticks; and
- Ongoing evaluation of new sharps safety devices (e.g., safety needles) and techniques, as they become available.

One example of the success of the communications campaign and these additional efforts is the 2017 needle scrape incident you mentioned, which the lab worker reported immediately and did not result in infection.