

More than Ebola: Nurses face daily dangers at work

The news that two nurses caught Ebola after caring for a man who later died of the infection at a Texas hospital has alarmed nurses and health care officials nationwide. Investigators are looking into how the women contracted the infection, saying that a breach of protocol is to blame. Nurses spoke out about a lack of training and confusion in the isolation ward where the women worked on the man.

In response, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued [new rules for workers](#) who come into contact with Ebola patients, including requirements to wear double sets of gloves, hoods with full face shields and special masks.

For the vast majority of nurses in the U.S., Ebola is currently an unlikely danger on the job, though that could change in the event of a wider outbreak in the U.S. Even without the danger of this infection, nurses everywhere live with the danger of workplace illnesses and infections.

According to a [book made available online](#) by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, nurses face a particular risk from needlesticks. An estimated 600,000 to 800,000 such injuries occur every year, and an estimated 1,000 health care workers will contract a serious infection such as hepatitis B or C or HIV from a needlestick.

Nurses are also exposed to thousands of chemicals and toxic substances, including aerosols, gases and skin contaminants. These chemicals can trigger asthma attacks, cause skin irritation and other problems.

Another danger: violence. Health care workers are assaulted more than workers in other industries. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the health care sector made up 45

percent of all nonfatal workplace assaults that resulted in lost workdays. That includes assaults to workers in nursing homes, psychiatric facilities, and emergency departments.

Finally, nurses experience high rates of musculoskeletal injuries. Nurses have a high risk of musculoskeletal injuries, including back injuries and injuries of the upper extremities. According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, in 2011 registered nurses had work-related musculoskeletal disorders at roughly the same rate as construction workers.

For information about workers' comp and nurse injuries, see our page on hospital workers.