

# Allergy Testing and Bloodborne Pathogens

Many allergists, dermatologists, doctors, and other health care workers, use the “prick and wipe” or “scratch and wipe” to test for allergies. It’s important to take care when using this method, to avoid exposure to bloodborne pathogens.

## The prick and wipe

This type of allergy testing procedure creates a number of chances for the health care worker to be exposed to a contaminated sharp. The procedure requires the employee to introduce allergenic extract or control solutions into the skin by piercing or scratching the skin. This can sometimes cause bleeding during the application. If the health care worker only uses one device per patient, the sharp may be cleaned dozens of times to remove the test substances and any body fluids. Most often, the cleaning is done using a two-handed technique, instead of the preferred, and safer, one-handed approach.

## The two-handed approach

Traditional safety measures to clean sharps used in allergy testing involve using one hand to hold the sharp, and putting the cleaning apparatus in the other hand. There are some alternative controls to using this technique, which are available at little or no additional cost.

1. Engineering controls like disposable and one time test devices are available from several manufacturers. Instead of being cleaned and reused, these devices are thrown out after use.
2. Altering the task itself can also create much safer work practices. If you must clean the sharp, use a one-handed technique which reduces the employee’s potential direct exposure to the contaminated sharp.
  - Place the cleaning device on a hard surface, then use one hand to pass the contaminated sharp through the cleaning apparatus using a holding device.
  - Hold the cleaning device with an instrument like forceps, and then pass the contaminated sharp through it.

## Using personal protective equipment

In general, personal protective equipment (PPE), like gloves, are not necessary when performing allergy skin testing as long as hand contact with blood is not reasonably anticipated. If a worker decides to use medical gloves, it will not prevent exposure in the case of a needle puncture. That’s why the previously mentioned work practice controls are encouraged to prevent such an exposure.

OSHA recommends that the engineering and work practice controls implemented in cleaning the needles used for allergy testing procedures be carefully evaluated to determine their effectiveness in eliminating or minimizing potential occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens.

For more information and additional risk management and prevention tools, visit: [fwcruminsurance.com](http://fwcruminsurance.com)