

Hand Injuries

Let's high five for safety!

As often as we use our hands during every day tasks, it's no wonder hand injuries are among the most common type of workplace injury. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), nearly 20% of workplace injuries involve cuts and lacerations to the hands and fingers. Hand injuries are second only to back strains and sprains in lost workdays. From a local perspective, our hands are one of the most common injured body parts here at Northwestern.

**Northwestern Employee Hand Injuries
 2016 – 2018**

# of Hand Injuries	Body Part
79	Finger(s)
27	Hand
10	Thumb
3	Wrist(s) and Hand(s)

As you can see, hand injuries are a concern for our own Wildcats. Did you know that 26% of Northwestern's hand injuries involve cuts, punctures, or scrapes? Since hand injuries occur at such high frequency, it is critical to try to prevent injuries from happening in the first place. Hand injury prevention begins with a recognition and understanding of the hazards in the workplace. For example, 5% of Northwestern's hand injuries surprisingly involve the feet; employees who slip on surfaces or trip over hazards often try to catch their fall with their hands, resulting in an injury.

Common types of hand injuries:

- ❖ Excessive repetitive motion
- ❖ Sprains from excessive force
- ❖ Punctures, lacerations, and cuts from tools and other sharp objects
- ❖ Burns from contact or exposure to electricity, chemicals, and hot substances
- ❖ Strains from awkward posture

The key to hand injury prevention

In order to prevent hand injuries, we must think proactively and anticipate how these injuries occur in the first place. Below are key pieces of information about hand injuries and how to prevent them:



- ❖ Always be conscientious of where your hands are, especially while welding and working with power tools, hot objects, chemicals, energy sources, and machinery
- ❖ Replace or remove defective tools from service and maintain proper housekeeping – these protocols are critical to a safe work environment
- ❖ Understand how each piece of equipment's machine guarding works and ensure its in place during operation
- ❖ As the last line of defense, wear the right personal protective equipment (PPE) for each job i.e. latex rubber gloves for chemical resistance or neoprene gloves while handling hydraulic fluids

How to respond to an injury...

- ❖ Report work-related injuries or accidents to your supervisor
- ❖ If urgent, dial 911; if non-urgent, go to a University-designated primary care facility
- ❖ Minor injuries may be treated with a first aid kit, however should still be reported
- ❖ For Workers' Compensation information, please contact Rey Andre, Claims Manager, at 847.491.5582 or randre@northwestern.edu

Preparation and training are essential

Learn more: Complete *Hand & Power Tool Safety; Welding, Cutting & Brazing* training at learn.northwestern.edu.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

- **Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review hand injury prevention in your workplace and make sure everyone knows what to do, who to notify, and where to go in the event of an injury.
- **Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.
- **Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Safety at Home

Our hands are some of our best tools when it comes to tending our homes or maintaining our yards. Similarly, children are constantly getting their hands into something new. This is why it is so important to keep your family's hands safe during the following common tasks:



- ✓ **Yardwork** – To avoid cuts and scrapes from stick and branches, wear appropriate gloves for each job and replace when damaged or worn
- ✓ **In the kitchen** – Keep knives out of reach of children and be sure to frequently sharpen your knives; unlike a dull knife, a sharp knife will move more predictably, therefore more safely
- ✓ **Electricity** – Install outlet covers to prevent children's small fingers from electrical shock

For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936 with any questions.

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management Services at gwen.butler@northwestern.edu for details.