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N.C. DHHS Cautions Against Sharing Diabetes Care Equipment

RALEIGH – Public health officials from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services are cautioning diabetic patients to protect themselves against the risk of disease transmission from shared insulin pens. This warning comes after the recent report of insulin pens being used on more than one patient at a Salisbury, North Carolina-based veterans hospital as well as two New York hospitals earlier this year.

Insulin pens are individual reusable medical devices which diabetic patients can use to administer insulin injections. Insulin pens are designed to be used multiple times, for a single patient only. Because blood can flow back into the insulin reservoir during an injection, there is a risk of a disease transmission if the pen is used for more than one person, even when the needle is changed.

“In North Carolina, nearly 1 in 10 adults has diabetes,” said State Health Director Laura Gerald, M.D. “It is never safe to share insulin injection devices, even between family members. When supplies are shared between people, blood glucose testing and insulin administration can expose people to bloodborne viruses like hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, and HIV. It is important for patients and caregivers to learn how to manage their disease and how to perform injections safely.”

Dr. Gerald especially urges diabetic individuals or family members of those who live in controlled care environments like hospitals, assisted living or nursing homes to ask if their caregivers are following recommended safety procedures for any injections, whether for diabetes or other procedures. When medical equipment used to penetrate the skin is used by more than one person, there is a risk of transmission of infections, even when the infection is unapparent, undiagnosed or unknown to the affected person.

To prevent infections, the N.C. DHHS Division of Public Health urges all health care providers and the public to follow three rules for safe diabetes care:

1. Fingertick devices should never be used for more than one person
2. Blood glucose meters should be assigned to only one person and not be shared
3. Injection equipment should never be used for more than one person

North Carolina, in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Safe Injection Practices Coalition (SIPC) and two other states, is promoting needle safety through the *One & Only Campaign* which advocates safe injection practices in all medical procedures for both healthcare providers and patients.

For more information on how to protect yourselves and your loved ones from potential health problems from medical injections, visit <http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/partner/north-carolina>

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