

Handling and Disposal of Sharps for Cleaning and Ground Staff

Fact: Discarded "Sharps" e.g. broken glass, needles and syringes are a cause of skin penetrating injuries, which can expose workers to blood-borne viruses such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).



"Sharps" refer to any object that can pierce or penetrate the skin easily.

Skin penetrating injuries may also expose workers to other infections, which may include Tetanus.

General Safety Tips

- Managers/supervisors should always conduct a risk assessment to identify and control any hazards associated with handling sharps in the particular situation.
- Workers must follow safe work practices which include wearing P.P.E.

Control the Risks

By following these guidelines for the safe handling of "Sharps" in the workplace, the risk of contracting infectious diseases will be minimised in the workplace. Always conduct a risk assessment before any controls are implemented and a risk assessment after the controls are implemented to ensure the risk has been reduced.

Handling and Disposal of Sharps

For safe removal of hypodermic needles/syringes the following precautions should be followed:

- Do not place hands or fingers into areas or objects where sharps may be concealed, such as into garbage bags, down between lounge chair cushions, behind toilet cisterns or drains without visibly checking first.
- Wear Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.) at all times when handling any type of sharp object which may be contaminated with blood or body products. Always wash hands after removing gloves.
- Do not recap, bend or break discarded sharps.
- To pick up the needle or syringe, place a sharps container beside the "Sharp" that requires collecting and pick up the item by using tongs or pliers and place in the container. **Do not hold the container with your free hand.**

Workers should not:

- manually compress garbage bags
- hold rubbish bags close to their body
- hold the base of rubbish bags
- place hands/fingers into concealed areas
- collect "sharps" with hands.



Contaminated broken glass/sharp object disposal

Where broken glass is found to be contaminated with blood or other body fluids, the following precautions should be followed:

- Leather gloves or suitable PVC types are to be worn (and if possible disposable gloves over the top to prevent contamination) when handling sharp objects which may be contaminated with blood or body fluids.
- Blood spills and the "Sharps" object should be treated with a 1:10 diluted bleach solution. Use a spray bottle.
- Sharp material if contaminated e.g. broken glass should be picked up with pliers or tongs provided and placed in an infectious waste container.

Disposal of contaminated/infectious waste

Materials are to be placed into a yellow infectious waste container, marked "infectious waste" and bearing the black international biohazard symbol.

Check with your supervisor for correct disposal of infectious waste.

Workers must be provided with a Sharps Disposal Kit containing disposable gloves, appropriate tongs or long nosed pliers and a rigid-walled, puncture resistant Sharps container for collection of "Sharps".

Immediate action for a Skin Penetrating Injury or Contamination by Blood or Body Fluids must be taken.

The following procedure should be followed:

- Stay calm.
- Immediately after a needle stick or contaminated sharps injury, consider the following points:
 - if the skin is penetrated wash the area well with soap and water (alcohol based hand rinses or alcohol wipes can be used if soap and water are not available);
 - if blood gets onto the skin, irrespective of whether there are cuts or abrasions, wash well with soap and water;
 - if eyes are contaminated, rinse the area gently with water or 0.9% Sodium Chloride (normal saline) solution, while the eyes are open;
 - if blood gets into the mouth, spit it out and then rinse the mouth with water several times.
- Disinfect the exposed area (e.g. with alcohol wipes).
- After disinfecting the exposed area, report immediately to your supervisor.

- Ensure any “Sharps” or needles involved in the injury are disposed of in the infectious waste container.
- Complete an incident report with your supervisor.

How are the risks reduced after exposure?

Your supervisor should act quickly to:

1. Ensure that the exposed area has been washed thoroughly.
2. Dispose of the needle, syringe, sharp or any other item which caused the injury into a sharps container. Do not collect “Sharps” for testing as the reliability of testing is unclear and the “sharp” may be hazardous to the persons trying to collect it.
3. Ensure employee seeks medical treatment. Treatment may be obtained through the employee’s own doctor or the Emergency Department at the local hospital.
4. Reassure the employee.
5. If necessary arrange support and counselling through the Employee Assistance Program.
6. Investigate the circumstances of the incident and document outcomes on the incident report.
7. Take measures to prevent recurrence. This may include changes to work practices, equipment and worker training.
8. Employee Confidentiality and the details of the incident must be maintained. Documentation must be kept on the worker’s file.
9. Ensure that the employee lodges a UniHIRTs/incident report as soon as possible.

Further information can be obtained from the links below.

<http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/business/hospitality/other/sharps/index.htm>

<http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/subjects/spi/index.htm>

Legislation

Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)

Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 (Qld)

Risk Management 2007 Code of Practice