# Safe Handling of Sharps



## WHAT IS A SHARP?

A sharp is an object or device with a sharp edge, a hard corner, a point or a protruding part. Common sharps include needles, syringes, lancets, scalpels, broken glass or other blades.

#### WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED?

A sharp can cause an injury, illness, or infection if it punctures, cuts, or scratches the skin. If a sharp is contaminated with bodily fluids, microbiological or radioactive substances, or chemicals, a serious or fatal infection can result. Blood-contaminated sharps can spread viruses such as those causing Hepatitis B, C, and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

### WHO IS AT RISK?

Some occupations—such as health care providers or laboratory workers—have a higher risk for a sharp-related injury or illness. Other workers who might be exposed to a sharp risk include emergency and public safety services, correctional and custodial workers, and providers of services to these industries such as plumbers and laundry workers.

#### INFORM AND PROTECT YOURSELF

If your work might expose you to a sharps risk, participate in all training related to the safe handling and disposal of sharps. Get a Hepatitis B vaccination. Help your employer select and evaluate devices with safety features that reduce the risks sharps present and use the devices provided.

#### HANDLE SHARPS SAFELY

Avoid or reduce sharps use and handling as much as possible or use effective alternatives. But, if you use sharps, follow these basic safety recommendations:

- Move carefully and deliberately with sharps/needles.
- Avoid walking unnecessary distances with sharps/needles.
- Point sharps/needles away from your body.
- Avoid recapping or re-sheathing needles/lancets.

- Never bend or break needles/sharps.
- Don't ask for sharps to be taken from you.
- Never remove needles from disposable syringes.
- Be alert to hidden sharps in linens, laundry, or disposal bags.

## DISPOSE OF SHARPS PERSONALLY, PROMPTLY, AND PROPERLY

You are personally responsible for the safe handling and disposal of any sharp/needle you use.

- Dispose of sharps in appropriate containers marked with a biohazard label.
- Never throw sharps into trash bins or plastic bags.
- When disposing sharps in the container:
- Place the sharp end in first (i.e. point it away from the body).
- Drop the sharp rather than push it into the container.
- Never put your hands inside the sharps container.
- Never open, empty, or clean a sharps container.

#### IF A SHARP INJURY OCCURS

If your skin is cut, punctured, or abraded by a needle or other sharp, report the incident to your supervisor and seek appropriate treatment immediately.