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.