

[Insert Organization] Handling & Disposing of Sharps Policy

Policy #:		Effective Date:	
Reviewed Date:		Next Review Date:	

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to enable [insert organization] staff to safely handle and dispose of "sharps."

APPLICATION

This policy applies to all programs, practices, communications, use of facilities, and provision of all [insert organization] services, and the staff, students, and third-party providers/contractors (e.g. security, cleaning, food services, etc.), supporting individuals within [insert organization]. This policy supports the Toronto Shelter Standards and a Housing First approach.

REGULATIONS

Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act

- [Regulation 474/07 – Needle Safety](#)

DEFINITIONS

Harm reduction: Harm reduction is both a philosophy and set of practical strategies aimed at reducing the adverse health, social and economic consequences associated with drug use (both legal and illegal) in ways that are non-judgmental and non-coercive. Harm reduction programs include the distribution of sterile injection equipment and disposal of used equipment. Harm reduction programs have been proven to decrease drug-related harms, including overdose and the spread of blood-borne pathogens such as HIV and Hepatitis B and C.

Biomedical waste: Biomedical waste is any kind of waste that contains infectious material (or material that is potentially infectious). It includes waste that is generated in healthcare settings or laboratories, as well as waste generated outside of those settings. Discarded, used needles are considered biomedical waste due to the possibility of there being blood-borne pathogens (such as HIV, Hepatitis B or C) remaining on the needle, which could be transmitted if the used needle is not properly contained and disposed of, and a needle stick injury occurs.

Injection equipment: Safer injection equipment may include needles and syringes in various sizes, sterile water, alcohol swabs, tourniquets, filters, acidifiers and cookers, etc. Sterile injection equipment is distributed to reduce the potential for harm (i.e., to prevent the transmission of blood-borne pathogens).

Needles and syringes: Needles are a long, thin, sharp tool for piercing the skin, made of metal. A syringe is a device, usually made of plastic, used for injecting or drawing fluids out of the body, also called a barrel. In this document, we use the term 'needles' to refer to needles with attached syringes, and without. Needles are also sometimes called sharps.

[Insert Organization]

Handling & Disposing of Sharps Policy

Needle stick injury: Needle stick injuries are accidental punctures of the skin. They are a concern for people who come into contact with used needles because of the risk of transmission for blood-borne pathogens such HIV, Hepatitis B and C.

Routine practices: Routine practices used in health care settings to prevent and control infections.

Sharps: are items such as needles, razor blades, scissors, knives and broken glass that can cut or puncture the skin. When improperly handled or disposed, sharps can penetrate the skin causing physical injury and potentially cause infection if contaminated with bacteria, viruses or other pathogens.

SAFER SHARPS HANDLING PRINCIPLES

1. Always practice [good hand hygiene](#) and have hand washing facilities available – this includes sink with running water, soap, and hand dryer or disposable towels.
2. Make 70-90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer available and accessible for instances when hands are not visibly soiled but hand hygiene is necessary.
3. Always have a sharps containers on-hand to support safe and timely sharps disposal.
4. Never recap needles prior to disposal. Most injuries related to sharps occur when replacing the cap on a used needle. Improperly disposed needles should be immediately discarded into an appropriate container as soon as they are found.
5. Do not purposefully bend, break or remove a needle tip from a syringe.
6. Never dispose of sharps in the regular garbage. Sharps should be placed into an approved biohazardous waste container that is rigid, leak-proof sealable container.
7. Always ensure that the sharps container lid is secured and opening accessible prior to disposing a sharp.
8. Do not insert fingers into the opening of a sharps container
9. Do not continue to use sharps containers that are full ($\frac{3}{4}$ /three quarters of container). Instead, retrieve a new container to dispose of the found sharp. Full containers should be sealed and stored for biohazardous waste pick up.
10. Do not attempt to open a sharps container that has been lock sealed.

PROCEDURES

How to Safely Handle and Dispose of an Improperly Discarded Sharp

1. Put on nitrile gloves to protect yourself from any potential fluid contamination.
2. Place a sharps container, with lid fastened, close to the sharp on a stable surface.
3. Pick up the sharp using forceps, BBQ tongs, or tweezers. If the sharp is a needle, pick it up, by the barrel (the plastic tubular part of the syringe) with the tip facing down and away from you and others. If there are multiple needles, pick them up one at a time.
4. Place used sharps, one at a time, in a sharps container with the sharp edge/tip pointed away from you and close the container opening Securely store the container with disposed sharps.
5. Wash hands with soap and water or if hand washing facilities are not close by and hands are not visibly soiled, clean hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

[Insert Organization] Handling & Disposing of Sharps Policy

Sharp Injury Management

It is very rare to contract an infectious disease from an improperly disposed needle.

In the event of a sharps injury:

1. Remain Calm
2. Allow the wound to bleed freely and DO NOT squeeze
3. Gently wash the wound with soap and water
4. Apply a sterile, waterproof bandage
5. Seek immediate medical attention
6. Inform the supervisor immediately of a sharps-related injury

Guidelines for Sharps Container Selection

Sharps containers should have the following features:

- Available from reputable medical supply vendor
- Puncture-resistant
- Leak-proof
- Tamper-proof
- Facilitate one-hand disposal.
- Designed to easily place sharp into container but be difficult to remove the contents.
- Mechanisms to prevent accidental entry
- Labelled as "Biohazardous" materials
- Handles for safe transport

APPENDICES:

[Needle Disposal: Guidance for Policies and Procedures by Toronto Public Health](#)

[Needle Safety Resources & Information](#)

[IPAC Manual for Shelter Settings](#)

[SSHA Harm Reduction Framework](#)

[Toronto Shelter Standards: Section 10.2.1 Harm Reduction](#)