

## Working with Needles and Sharps

This information sheet will introduce you to some of the procedures that relate to working safely around needles and sharps. This term principally relates to any item that may be contaminated with a harmful substance / virus / bacteria and cause health concerns to individuals should it cause a break in the skin. Typically this relates to used needles or similar materials used by drug users or those with a known blood borne virus.

### On discovering needles / sharps

- Where practicable, make the area safe and get help.
- **Always** take the "sharps box" and selected kit items to the needle / sharp; never the other way round!
- Sharps boxes are available in different sizes ranging from a small hand held (for minimal needles found) to large free standing ones (for larger amounts found on a regular basis).
- Choose a box that suits your service location needs: you can always select / transfer to a larger box later if required.
- Your kit should include tweezers, gloves, disinfectant, plasters, dressings, etc.
- Always select required items **before** lifting any sharp / needle.

### Uplifting needles / sharps

- Assess the situation/ location of the discovered sharp / needle.
- If sharp / needle is surrounded by body fluid / blood, is there any possibility of any blood/ fluid getting underneath your gloves, onto your hands and then into your own blood system.
- Check hands for cuts prior to lifting sharp/needle in fluid. Before you don any suitable item of PPE (e.g. Gloves) apply plasters to such cuts.
- Don suitable PPE: - gloves, safety footwear, apron, etc. as required (depending on your job).
- For further advice check Risk Assessments and COSHH Assessments
- Use tweezers to uplift sharps / needles and place in the sharps box through designated opening.
- Always lift needles individually, never more than one at a time as this increases the possibility of receiving a needle stick injury.
- Never put your hands where you cannot visually examine first.

### **Use of a small hand held sharps box:**

- As a rule of thumb, always hold the sharps box at point / side where the handle is located (or side opposite the disposal point).
- This ensures the designated disposal point is as far away from your hand as possible.
- You may be distracted when disposing of a sharp / needle and your hand may slip and miss the opening. If so, you will minimise the possibility of sustaining a needle stick injury.
- The chances of obtaining a needle stick injury increase if the sharps box is held in any other manner.

### **Use of a larger sharps box:**

- As before, carry the box to the location of the sharp / needle. Set box down beside sharp / needle on a solid footing where practicable.
- Pick up sharp / needle with tweezers and drop into the box through the flap at the top.
- **Never** place fingers inside box to hold the flap open when discarding sharps / needles.

### **Dispose of material**

- All "**soft**" material should be disposed of in accordance with the guidance contained in IS10 - Safe Disposal of Human Hygiene and First Aid Waste.
- **Never** place sharps / needles in this waste stream. These are only for soft material such as disposable gloves, light weight plastic aprons, soiled bandages, soft cloths used to soak up blood / fluids, etc.
- Uplift of sharps containers may be arranged in accordance with Service procedures and using the appointed Council contractor.
- Always take due care and attention when disposing of any sharp / needle.

### **Needle/ sharp removal from...**

- If a needle is located outside in a public place such as in a park or streetscape area, Infrastructure Services will generally arrange to have the needle uplifted.
- If however the needle is located within a house or close, Enterprise and Housing Services would be responsible for its removal from site.
- Sharps located in other operational buildings will be the responsibility of the Head of Establishment.
- If further clarification is required contact your supervisor / line manager first. If advice is still required, contact your Service Health and Safety team.

## Remember

- Assess the situation;
- Don appropriate PPE as per Risk / COSHH Assessments;
- Always take the sharps box to the needle / sharp;
- If due care and attention is taken at all times, there is minimal chance of receiving a needle stick injury;
- The chance of contracting a BBV from a needle stick injury is **low!**

## Manual Handling

Bending over to uplift discarded sharps / needles can result in injury to your spine. Repeated bending and stretching to lift paper pens, etc. in the wrong way can permanently damage your spine. As much care and attention as possible should be given to ensuring your back lasts the full length of your life time.

- Always bend down from your knees keeping your back naturally straight. (never from your back with straight legs).
- let your legs do the work, **not** your back.
- Stand up smoothly using your legs (lead with your head to naturally straighten your back).

**Further guidance and advice is available from your Safety & Wellbeing team**  
[healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk)

## Other Resources

Online Training – Infection Control (Log in to Learn)  
IS10 - Safe Disposal of Human Hygiene and First Aid Waste ver3  
IS15 - Blood Borne Viruses  
IS32 – Hand Hygiene  
IS84 – Infection Control (General Information)  
GD27 - Preventing Dermatitis  
AS13 – Control of Substances Hazardous to Health  
AS38a – Response to Pandemic Flu  
AS38b – Blood Borne Viruses

