

Procedures for sharps handling and disposal

Work Health and Safety Directorate

Sharps in the workplace environment pose a hazard. Sharps can potentially cause an injury if handled inappropriately.

Responsibility for disposal of sharps

If employees locate a discarded sharp whilst cleaning staff are on duty, they should request cleaning staff to dispose of it immediately. If students are present at the time a sharp is discovered, the employee should ensure students are kept away from the sharp while a cleaning staff member is located. Under the current cleaning arrangements for schools, colleges and campuses, cleaning staff are to be aware of and trained in their responsibilities regarding the collection and safe disposal of discarded sharps by their employer company.

If there are no cleaning employees on duty or there are no cleaning employees available, the workplace manager or their nominee must ensure that procedures are in place that provide for employees to act promptly to dispose of the discarded sharps in a safe manner as outlined in these procedures.

Department employees who use sharps are responsible for their management and disposal.

Disposable needles, needle syringe combinations, blades, pipettes and other sharp items should be placed in a sharps container for disposal. Refer below for the supply of sharps containers.

Important: Students must not be involved in the disposal of sharps process

Safe handling and disposal of discarded sharps

The preferred option to reduce the risk of exposure to infections via a sharps injury is the collection of needles and syringes and other sharp instruments using hands free technique by the use of appropriate tongs or similar pick up equipment designed for this purpose. (a dustpan and brush may be a practical solution in some circumstances but should not be the principle method recommended because it lacks control, particularly when trying to place the syringe into the narrow opening of a sharps container. If a dustpan and brush is used, a slow, sweeping movement should be used to prevent the needle from being flicked into the air. Use of puncture (cut) resistant gloves is recommended.

Where hands are to be used, care should be taken to avoid direct contact with the sharp. This method should be used only when the hands free technique is not possible. Use of puncture (cut) resistant gloves is recommended in all circumstances and not just for “hands on” situations. If hands are used, NSW Ministry of Health recommends that the following steps should occur:

- Puncture (cut) resistant gloves must be worn to decrease the risk of the wearer being jabbed by a sharp in all circumstances
- Where hands are to be used, care should be taken to avoid direct contact with the sharp and the method should be used only when the hands free technique is not possible
- Non-porous waterproof dressings must be used by the employee for chapped or broken skin, before putting on gloves; (or the use of disposable gloves under the puncture resistant gloves may be a more practical option in the circumstance)
- Before syringes are picked up, people nearby, especially students, should be instructed to move away
- Ensure that there is space to move and to clearly observe both the sharp and your hands
- Syringes should be picked up by the barrel at the opposite end to the needle because the needle may be bent over and hard to see
- A needle must not be removed from a syringe for disposal, or be purposely broken or otherwise manipulated
- If there is more than one needle or sharp instrument, carefully separate them from one another with a stick or other suitable implement using slow, non-flicking movements. Do not use your hands. Do not pick up or handle more than one sharp at a time
- Do not attempt to put the cap back on a syringe as that is how most people accidentally jab themselves. The cap is usually a bright orange colour, and can be disposed of separately
- Each sharp must be placed into an approved sharps container. Only approved sharps containers are to be used (see below)
- To minimise risk, the sharps container should be taken to the sharp; and the sharps container should first be placed on the ground, and then the syringe or sharp placed into it, needle end first
- Employees should **not** request someone to hold the container while the sharp is being put in the container, as the sharp may jab them.

Safe disposal of discarded sharps

It is important that sharps are disposed of promptly and safely. The following issues should be addressed:

- Syringes should not be put into glass jars or bottles, plastic cordial or soft drinks bottles or aluminium drink cans. These can break, be punctured or may be recycled, leading to potential injuries to employees or other persons such as waste and recycling industry workers at a later stage
 - Sharps should not be thrown down stormwater drains, as the syringes may then be carried into watercourses. Sharps should not be flushed down toilets; and
 - Schools, colleges and campuses can contact the NSW Ministry of Health Needle Clean Up Hotline (1800 633 353) regarding disposal of sharps containers holding **only** needles and syringes that have been inappropriately discarded such as in playgrounds, around buildings etc. The hotline is **not** to be used for disposing of general sharps containers (see below). The hotline is a service that coordinates the clean up of dumped needles and syringes across the whole of NSW.
- Schools, colleges and campuses should assess whether they have an ongoing need for the supply and disposal of sharps containers on the basis of past experience
 - If the school, college or campus considers that such a need exists, it is their responsibility to obtain and store these containers
 - **For schools and preschools, sharps containers should be stored so they are not easily accessed by students, employees or visitors. In some DEC workplaces such as some TAFE colleges and campuses, sharps containers are supplied in identified locations**
 - There may be local council arrangements in place in your area for the safe removal of sharps
 - If discarded needles and syringes are found in workplace grounds or surrounds, these should be reported on a [Hazard Report form](#).

Disposal of other sharps

Schools, colleges and campuses generate other sharp items in the normal course of operations. These may include:

- Sharps used in science laboratories and experiments including needles, razor blades, scalpels and broken pasteur pipettes
- Injecting equipment used by students to manage a medical condition
- When an EpiPen has been administered it should be stored safely until the ambulance arrives. It should then be provided to the ambulance crew so they are aware of what has been administered.
- Items used to assist in the toileting of students with an intellectual or other disability e.g. catheters; and
- Any other sharp objects or instruments designed to perform penetrating procedures.

It is important that sharps are disposed of promptly and safely. The following issues should be addressed:

- Sharps should always be segregated from general waste disposal. This is important to ensure that waste disposal personnel are not exposed to the risk of injury during collection or disposal of waste
- Where schools, colleges and campuses need to dispose of sharps containers, they should liaise with their current waste disposal contractor or local council to make appropriate arrangements; and
- Some items such as broken glass that has not come in contact with blood or other bodily fluids can be disposed of in normal waste. Dispose of such broken glass carefully e.g. by wrapping in many layers of newspaper so that sharp edges will not penetrate wrapping.

Supply of sharps containers

- A sharps container is a receptacle intended for the collection and disposal of sharps
- A sharps container is yellow in colour and has a description of the contents eg 'sharps' or 'infectious waste' printed on it
- Sharps containers that conform with AS4031-1992 are available through School Line, Q-Stores or on government contract number 3011 Sharps Disposal Systems

Further information

Contact your [WHS team](#) or ring **1800 811 523**
[Infection control procedures](#)

Support materials

[How to fit and remove protective gloves](#)
[Sharp objects risk management tools](#)