

Toolbox Talk / Note – Inappropriate Disposal of Sharps

Local Managers should communicate these key safety messages to their staff at handovers, staff meetings, huddles etc. They are developed in response to events that have occurred or identified hazards.

What are 'sharps'?

'Sharps' are needles, blades (such as scalpels) and other medical instruments that are necessary for carrying out healthcare work. These items / materials could cause injury and other associated issues if not handled and disposed of safely.

- Within general / clinical waste areas
- In public toilets, other facilities or communal areas on the ground / in black waste bags
- Within overfilled or incorrectly assembled sharps containers

Examples of Sharps

- Needles
- Scalpels / blades
- Scissors / cutters
- Glass ampoules
- Razors
- Dental equipment
- Other sharp materials / equipment

Where are sharps found inappropriately disposed of?

This can be almost anywhere however the most common places are:

- In clinical areas on the ground, on surfaces or in orange / black waste bags
- Within materials sent to the laundry facilities
- Attached to equipment / on metal trays, trolleys or containers sent for decontamination

What is the risk?

Evidence shows that incidents / injuries often occur as a result of a used medical sharp that has been disposed of inappropriately by either not placing it in a sharps container or into an overfull / incorrectly assembled container.

The main risk from a sharps injury is puncture / laceration injuries and potential exposure to infections such as blood-borne viruses (BBV). This can occur where the injury involves a sharp that is contaminated with blood or a bodily fluid from an infected patient. The blood-borne viruses of most concern are Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C & HIV.

It is important that all injuries are risk assessed following the organisation wide procedure in place for needlestick injuries and that all incidents including near miss incidents are reported. An exemplar generic risk assessment is available here: <http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/working-with-us/hr-connect/health-safety/management-manual/risk-assessment/>

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Who is at Risk?

Anyone from staff, patients and visitors could be exposed to sharps if they are inappropriately disposed of however staff are generally most at risk. This includes clinical staff who directly use / handle sharps however incidents more frequently involve support staff who may be inadvertently put at risk during cleaning, maintenance, storage of waste / materials, transport or within laundry / decontamination units for example.

What should you do if you find a 'Sharp' in the wrong place?

Each situation will be unique and require you to consider the hazard presented to you but where possible:

- Stop what you are doing as soon as you notice the sharp if it is safe to do so.
- Ensure the area is safe to prevent anyone else inadvertently being injured or exposed.
- Dispose of the sharp using appropriate equipment / sharps container following local procedures:
 - Apply the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), for example, gloves.
 - Use a mechanical aid (e.g.

ample probe or similar device) to lift the sharp and place it directly into the sharps container.

- Take any other steps required relevant to your area of work.
- Follow the NHS GG&C guidance and local risk assessments in place.
- Report the incident/adverse event to your manager and ensure it is reported on Datix.

What do you need to remember?

Sharps safety starts with you! It is your responsibility to dispose of sharps safely!

Please see the toolbox talk / Notes on safe disposal and Management of Sharps Injuries for further information.

Also for any further guidance contact the Health & Safety Department or Infection Control / Occupational Health for any issues / incidents relevant to them.

E-learning modules are essential for all staff at risk of injury – these are available on LearnPro.

All incidents and near misses must be reported on Datix. See the tool box talks on Reporting Incidents and Near Misses.