




Sharps Management

'Sharps' are items that can cause cuts and puncture wounds, including needles and sharp instruments. It's your responsibility to dispose of sharps safely into a sharps container when you have used them. Even if you don't use sharps in your role, you still need to be aware of good practice.

Good practice to prevent needlestick/sharps injuries

- Always use an injection tray with an integral sharps container and dispose of the sharps at the point of use to reduce the risk of injuries whilst carrying sharps.
- Never recap used needles due to the high risk of injury.
- Always dispose of the needle and syringe as one unit into the sharps container. Never attempt to remove the needle from the syringe.
- Sharps should be disposed of at source by the person using them. Passing used sharps from person-to-person increases the risk of injury.

Colour code for sharps containers

Purple lid: For the disposal of sharps contaminated with cytotoxic and cytostatic medicines.	
Orange lid: For the disposal of sharps not contaminated with medicines.	
Yellow lid: For the disposal of sharps contaminated with medicines.	

Sharps containers

- Select the correct colour-coded sharps container.
- Select the correct size sharps container according to the usage. Large containers should only be used when a high volume of sharps are generated.
- Containers must be assembled correctly as per the manufacturer's instructions, ensuring the lid is snapped firmly in place all around the rim.
- For traceability purposes, when assembled, the label on the container must be dated and signed and must have practice/care home address clearly visible.

- Containers must be placed in a safe position that avoids spillages, and at a height that allows the safe disposal of sharps. Containers should **NEVER be** placed on the floor.
- To avoid accidents, containers should be away from public access areas and out of reach of children.
- Replace the lid opening to the temporary closed position after use to prevent the risk of spillage.
- Containers must not be filled above the fill line as this could result in sharps protruding out of the opening.
- Containers must be disposed of when the full line is reached. The fill line is clearly marked on the container and is usually $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up, never full to the top. Ensure the container is locked, and then dated and signed. Write the location on the label. Containers awaiting disposal should be stored in a secure location.
- Containers should be disposed of every 3 months **even if not full**, in accordance with local policy.
- Containers should not be used for any other purpose than disposal of sharps.

In the event of a needlestick/sharps injury

1. Encourage the wound to bleed by squeezing under running water (never suck the wound).
2. Wash the wound with liquid soap and warm water then dry.
3. Cover the wound with a waterproof dressing.
4. Report the injury to your manager immediately.
5. Immediately contact your GP or occupation health department. Out of normal office hours, attend an Accident and Emergency (A&E) department.
6. If your injury is from a needlestick/sharp which has been used on a service user (source), the doctor in charge of their care may take a blood sample from the service user to test for Hepatitis B, C and HIV (following counselling and agreement of the service user).

At the GP/Occupation Health/A&E department:

- A blood sample will be taken from you to check your Hepatitis B vaccination/antibody levels, and you will be offered immunoglobulin if they are low. The blood sample will be stored until results are available. If the source of the sharps injury is unknown you will have further blood samples taken at 6, 12 and 24 weeks for Hepatitis C and HIV.
- If the service user (source) is known or suspected to be HIV positive, you will be offered post exposure HIV prophylaxis (PEP) treatment. Ideally this should commence within 1 hour of the injury, but can be given up to two weeks after the injury.

Test your knowledge

Please tick the correct answer

True

False

1. Sharps containers must not be filled above the fill line.

2. In the event of a needlestick injury, the first action you should always take is to bleed the wound by squeezing it.

Remember:

- Dispose of needles and syringes as one unit into the sharps container.
- Always replace the lid opening to the temporary closed position after use to prevent the risk of spillage.
- To reduce the risk of spillage or accident, never place sharps containers on the floor.

Practical Activity *Please tick appropriate box when activity has been completed*

In your workplace, check that you have the correct colour-coded sharps container in use.

Check that the label on the containers in use have been dated and signed.

Ask your colleagues to describe the correct procedure to follow if they sustain a sharps injury.

Immediate action following an inoculation accident

IMMEDIATE ACTION **STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND ATTEND THE INJURY**



Encourage bleeding of the wound
By applying gentle pressure
Do not suck



Wash well under running water



Dry and apply a waterproof dressing, as necessary



If body fluids splash into eyes
Irrigate with cold water



If body fluids splash into mouth,
Do not swallow, rinse out
Several times with cold water



Report the incident to manager
Complete Exposure to BBV Risk Assessment
for prophylaxis to HIV and Hepatitis



Complete accident form or IR1 Form



Initiate investigation as to cause of incident and risk assessment



Clean unused Instrument/needle
Likely – No further action



Injury from used needle/instrument
Completed BBV Risk Assessment

Advice from A&E, GUM or
Occupational health