

2022

# Best Practices to Support Safe Sharps Disposal

HELPING OUR COMMUNITY STAY SAFE



Adapted with permission from Grey Bruce Health Unit

## Table of Contents

Best Practices to Support Safe Sharps Disposal in Non-Healthcare Settings .....	2
Safe Sharps Disposal Policy Example .....	4
Needle Stick Injury Policy Example.....	7
Safe Handling and Disposal of Sharps Training PowerPoint Exert.....	9
Found Sharp/Drug Equipment Tracking Example Sheet.....	10
Safe Sharps Disposal Resources .....	11
References .....	12

## **Best Practices to Support Safe Sharps Disposal in Non-Healthcare Settings**

### **Background:**

Discarded sharps in public places is a challenge that many communities face. Evidence-based best practices, policies, and procedures related to needle disposal can prevent and greatly reduce the risk of harms from improper needle disposal when applied consistently (Toronto Public Health, 2018). A community approach is required to address this issue.

A sharp is any item having corners, edges, or projections capable of cutting or piercing the skin. Examples of sharps include needles, syringes, lancets, and auto-injectors. Sharps are used by a diverse range of community members including people with certain medical conditions (i.e., diabetes, cancer, and arthritis), pet owners, and people who use illicit substances. When sharps are discarded improperly in a community, it is often a result of not having accessible places to properly dispose of them (Bridgeman & LePage, 2017, p.3). Proper education and access to safe disposal options are required in our community to support and address local concerns for safe sharps disposal.

A common safety concern of needle litter by community members are needle stick injuries. Used sharps can contain blood from other people and an accidental puncture wound from a sharp can allow the entry of infection through the skin (Middlesex-London Health Unit, 2021). Accidental puncture from a used sharp can result in blood-borne infections such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV. Injury from used needles found outdoors is considered to have a low risk of infection but it is still extremely important to be cautious (Toronto Public Health, 2018).

Those who may come into contact with discarded sharps in the community through their work should have the knowledge and tools to be able to safely manage these situations. In addition, publicly located sharps disposal units can decrease found sharps in the community thereby increasing safety in the community. It also demonstrates an inclusive community approach to support all persons who use sharps.

### **Things to consider prior to implementing safe sharps disposal best practices in your organization:**

- Consider tracking the location of found sharps. This will allow you to identify if this is an issue in your organization, the need for staff training and possible sites for sharps disposal unit installation.
- Meet with affected staff early in the planning phase to raise awareness of the issue and to provide education on this topic (e.g., what sharps are, what drug paraphernalia looks like, etc.). Work with staff to develop relevant processes to manage and address this concern.
- Develop policies/guidelines that address the following:
  - Safe disposal of sharps and staff educational requirements
  - What to do in the event of a needle stick injury
  - Process for sharps disposal unit maintenance if applicable (e.g., how often is it checked, who is responsible for monitoring the unit and responding to calls from public if issues arise, number for public to call if there is an issue)

- Contact medical waste companies to source options for secure sharps disposal containers or learn current biohazardous waste disposal procedures and investigate if this cost can be shared with existing facilities.
- Train the staff who will be responsible for sharps unit maintenance (if applicable). Training should cover sharps unit use, safe handling and disposal of sharps, policy review, etc.
- Consider sharing infographics and toolkits in your organization or on social media to increase public awareness and education on related topics (e.g., I Found A Needle. Now What? poster, Let's Get to the Point: Safely Pick Up Litter in Chatham-Kent toolkit, remind public of local pharmacies that accept used sharps in approved biohazard waste containers).

**Things to consider during implementation of safe sharp disposal best practices in your organization:**

- Consider completing a media release to let the public know about the installation of the sharp container (if applicable). In the media release, put the number and hours of the staff to contact should there be an issue with the unit.
- Address issues as they arise. Keep this as a standing item during meetings with involved staff.
- Monitor and evaluate effectiveness and opportunities for improvement. Examples of possible evaluation indicators are number of needles found prior to installation of the unit vs. post installation, how often are staff emptying the unit, average number of needles collected and disposed of, and staff confidence level in maintaining the unit/need for continued professional development.

## Safe Sharps Disposal Policy Example

**ORGANIZATION'S NAME  
ADMINISTRATION POLICY  
SECTION # – ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT**

<b>Title/Subject:</b>	Safe Sharp Disposal Example Policy	<b>Policy Number:</b>	#
<b>Original Date:</b>	Month, DD, YYYY	<b>Designated Code:</b>	
<b>Revision Date:</b>	Month, DD, YYYY	<b>Page:</b>	Page # of #
<b>Reference(s):</b>	Bridgeman, J., & LePage, R. (2017). Safe sharps disposal toolkit. A community response to a community issue. Retrieved from the Interior Health website: <a href="http://www.interiorhealth.ca">www.interiorhealth.ca</a> Sudbury and District Health Unit [SDHU]. (2017). Safe needle disposal. Retrieved from the <u>SDHU website: <a href="http://www.phsd.ca/">www.phsd.ca/</a></u>	<b>Approved By:</b>	
		<b>Signature:</b>	

**Policy:** To ensure safe disposal of sharps and/or drug equipment found in the community to keep staff, volunteers, and community members safe. Sharps may contain blood, body fluids or hazardous substances and must be treated as a health hazard and disposed of according to best practice recommendations.

**Application:** This policy applies to individuals who will dispose of sharps found in the community.

**Definitions:** A sharp is any item having corners, edges, or projections capable of cutting or piercing the skin. Examples of sharps include needles with attached syringes, lancets and auto-injectors.

**Background:** Discarded sharps in public places is a challenge that many communities face. Evidence-based best practices, policies, and procedures related to needle disposal can prevent and greatly reduce the risk of harms from improper needle disposal when applied consistently (Toronto Public Health, 2018). A community approach is required to address this issue.

Sharps are used by a diverse range of community members including people with certain medical conditions (i.e., diabetes, cancer, and arthritis), pet owners, and people who use illicit substances. When sharps are discarded improperly in a community, it is often a result of not having accessible places to properly dispose of them (Bridgeman & LePage, 2017, p.3). Proper education and access to safe disposal options are required in our community to support and address local concerns for safe sharps disposal.

A common safety concern of needle litter by community members are needle stick injuries. Used sharps can contain blood from other people and an accidental puncture wound from a sharp can allow the entry of infection through the skin (Middlesex-London Health Unit, 2021). Accidental puncture from a used sharp can result in blood-borne infections such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV. Injury from used needles found outdoors is considered to have a low risk of infection but it is still extremely important to be cautious (Toronto Public Health, 2018). Those who may come into contact with discarded sharps in the community through their work should have the knowledge and tools to be able to safely manage these situations.

**Policy Requirements:** The organization must ensure that all staff and volunteers responsible for sharps disposal receive safe sharps disposal training and equipment prior to taking on this role.

**Consequences and Monitoring:** Failure to implement this policy could result in staff/volunteer injury and/or illness. The implementation of this policy will be monitored by management/supervisors.

#### **Procedure for Assessing the Site of Found Sharps for Hazards:**

1. Before proceeding with safe sharps disposal, assess the site of the found sharp/drug equipment for potential hazards. Examples of possible hazards include:
  - a. Additional sharps/drug equipment
  - b. Tripping hazards
  - c. Environmental hazards such as ice, water, or fire hazards
  - d. Presence of an unknown substance
2. If safe to proceed, follow the Procedure for the Safe Disposal of Found Sharps below. If unsafe to proceed, contact supervisor for direction.

#### **Procedure for the Safe Disposal of Found Sharps:**

1. Gather and prepare equipment
  - Obtain a Sharps Disposal Kit if you have one. This kit contains all equipment required to safely dispose of sharps including gloves, tongs, and a regulated sharps container.
  - If you do not have a Sharps Disposal Kit, gather a hard-sided puncture-proof container (e.g., pop bottle, empty jar, laundry container with lid, etc.), puncture-proof or disposable gloves, and tongs.
  - At the site of the found needle, place the puncture-proof container on a flat surface.



2. Pick up the sharp
  - Put on puncture-proof or disposable gloves, if available.
  - Pick up sharps one at a time using tongs, if available. If you do not have tongs, pick up the sharp by its shaft/barrel (if the sharp is a needle).
  - Place the sharp in the puncture-proof container needle point down. If using tongs to dispose of sharps on one occasion, dispose of tongs in the garbage. If using tongs to dispose of sharps on more than one occasion, clean and disinfect the tongs prior to placing back in the sharps disposal kit.
  - Never try to force the needle into the container. Be sure the container is not too full, and nothing is coming out of the opening.
3. Dispose of the sharp
  - Secure the lid of the regulated sharp or puncture-proof container.

- If you used a regulated sharps container, lock the lid, and secure the container in a safe place. Return the container at  $\frac{3}{4}$  full.
- If you used a puncture-proof container (e.g., pop bottle, empty jar, laundry container with lid, etc.), place the container in a community Safe Sharp Disposal bin or bring it to a [local pharmacy](#).
- If transporting the puncture-proof container, place it in the back of the vehicle. It is recommended to use a puncture resistant tote with a lid for transportation to add an extra layer of safety.



- Dispose of gloves and wash hands with warm soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
4. Notify supervisor of the location, a description of the found sharps and actions taken.

**Supporting Documents:** [Safe Sharps Disposal Training](#), [Best Practices to Support Safe Sharps Disposal in Non-Healthcare Settings](#).

## Needle Stick Injury Policy Example

**ORGANIZATION'S NAME  
ADMINISTRATION  
POLICY SECTION # – CROSS PROGRAM**

<b>Title/Subject:</b>	Needle Stick Injury and/or Exposure to Blood and Body Fluids Example Policy	<b>Policy Number:</b>	#
<b>Original Date:</b>	Month, DD, YYYY	<b>Designated Code:</b>	
<b>Revision Date:</b>	Month, DD, YYYY	<b>Page:</b>	Page # of #
<b>Reference(s):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Health Agency of Canada. National Advisory Committee on Immunization. <i>Canadian Immunization Guide</i>. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/canadian-immunization-guide.html">https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/canadian-immunization-guide.html</a></li> </ul>	<b>Approved By:</b>	Management
		<b>Signature:</b>	

---

**Purpose:** To facilitate prompt and efficient follow-up for the protection of staff, students and volunteers who have been exposed to a needle stick injury and/or exposure to blood or body fluids.

**Policy:** All staff, students and volunteers are required to follow the documented procedure in the event of a needle stick injury and/or exposure to blood or body fluids.

**Procedure:**

- 1.0 Upon injury and/or exposure to blood or bodily fluids from a known or unknown source staff, students or volunteers (hereinafter referred to as the “injured person”) shall follow the procedures to minimize/eliminate the risk of infection or injury:
  - 1.1 Encourage a needle stick injury to bleed freely and then cleanse the area thoroughly with soap and water.
  - 1.2 Following exposure to blood and/or bodily fluids, irrigate affected areas (e.g. eyes, mucosal membranes) immediately with water.
  - 1.3 Apply a sterile, waterproof bandage.
  - 1.4 Report the injury and/or hazardous situation immediately to a manager.



- 1.5 Proceed immediately to a primary health care provider or emergency department for assessment of injury and required blood testing.
  - 1.6 Follow immunization and/or prophylaxis recommendations of health care provider or emergency department after assessment of the potential risk from the incident.
  - 1.7 If your organization requires forms (e.g. Injury/Hazardous Situation Report, Serious Occurrence Reporting and Follow-Up Form, etc.) to be filled out, complete the form and forward to manager/Human Resources as soon as possible following the incident and/or within organizational time requirements.
  - 1.8 Follow up with primary health care provider or emergency department for further testing and treatment as appropriate.
  - 1.9 If you have any questions, call the Infectious Diseases Program at the Chatham-Kent Public Health Unit at 519-355-1071.
- 2.0 Upon injury and/or exposure to blood or bodily fluids from a known or unknown source, managers shall follow the procedures below to minimize/eliminate the risk of infection or injury to the injured person:
- 2.1 Ensure injured person has completed first aid steps as outlined in 1.1 to 1.4.
  - 2.2 Advise injured person to seek medical attention (health care provider or emergency department) as soon as possible. Assist with transportation needs for medical attention, as required (e.g. taxi, ambulance).
  - 2.3 Assist injured person to complete required organizational forms/reports.
  - 2.4 If your organization requires forms to be completed, receive them from the injured person. Complete the manager's section and forward to director/Human Resources as per organizational procedure.
  - 2.5 Follow up with recommendations following the occurrence as required.

## Safe Handling and Disposal of Sharps Training PowerPoint Exert

# Safe Handling and Disposal of Sharps



Adapted with permission from Grey Bruce Health Unit

## What is a Sharp?

- A sharp is an item having corners, edges, or projections capable of cutting or piercing the skin:
  - Needles
  - Needles with syringes
  - Needles from vacutainers
  - Needles with attached tubing
  - Insulin pen
  - Blades (razors, scalpels, exacto, etc.)
  - Broken glass that has come into contact with blood or other body fluids



To download the full electronic version of the Safe Handling and Disposal of Sharps PowerPoint, visit the CK Public Health Unit [website](#).



## **Safe Sharps Disposal Resources**

For more information on safe sharps disposal in our community, see the following resources:

- Chatham-Kent Public Health website (see Harm Reduction section): <https://ckphu.com/>
- I Found a Needle Now What Poster: <https://ckphu.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Safe-Disposal-updated-version.jpg>
- Safe Sharps Disposal Video: <https://ckphu.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/How-to-Pick-Up-A-Needle.mp4>
- How to Make a Sharps Disposal Kit/Cleaning and Disinfecting of Tongs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7tQc1wMHxg>
- Safely Pick Up Litter in Chatham-Kent: <https://ckphu.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Lets-Get-to-the-Point-Safely-Pick-up-Litter-Toolkit.pdf>

## References

- Bridgeman, J., & LePage, R. (2017). *Safe Sharps Disposal Toolkit. A Community Response to a Community Issue*. Retrieved from <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/PDFS/safe-sharps-disposal-toolkit.pdf>
- Middlesex-London Health Unit. (2021). *Safe Disposal of Sharps*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthunit.com/sharps-disposal>
- Toronto Public Health. (2018). *Needle Disposal: Guidance for Policies and Procedures*. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/8dbc-Needle-Disposal-Guidance.pdf>