

2019

# Best Practices to Support Safe Sharps Disposal

HELPING YOUR COMMUNITY STAY SAFE



Grey Bruce  
**Public Health**

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

### Background:

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. Drug equipment such as cookers, filters, pipes and alcohol swabs should also be treated as sharps.

Discarded sharps in public places is a challenge that many communities face. A community approach is required to address this issue.

People use sharps for a variety of reasons. “Some medical conditions require people to use needles such diabetes, cancer or arthritis. Others may use needles for medication to manage pain. People also use needles to inject drugs. When sharps are discarded improperly in a community, it is often a result of not having a place to properly dispose of them. Most people will dispose of sharps safely if safe choices are made available” (Bridgeman & LePage, 2017, p.3).

When a person finishes using a sharp, some of that person’s blood may still be inside the needle or the syringe (Sudbury and District Health Unit [SDHU], 2017). If a person gets poked by another person’s used needle and the blood goes into their bloodstream, they could get sick with infections like HIV, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C (SDHU, 2017). Most people will not get sick by picking up or getting poked by a used needle, but it is extremely important to be cautious (SDHU, 2017).

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 in your organization:

- Consider tracking the location of found sharps. This will allow you to identify if this is in an issue in your organization, the need for staff training and possible sites for sharps unit installation.
- Meet with involved staff, such as Maintenance or the Works Department, 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). 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 work with the organization to understand 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. Training should cover sharps unit use, safe handling and disposal of sharps, policy review, etc.
- Consider implementing media releases/social media/mail-outs to increase public awareness and education on related topics (e.g. Public Health Be Smart with Sharps or Keep Your Community Safe posters, remind public of local pharmacies that accept used sharps in approved biohazardous waste containers).

#### Things to consider during implementation:

- Consider completing a media release to let the public know about the installation of the sharps 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 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, staff confidence level in maintaining the unit/need for continued professional development.

#### References

- Bridgeman, J., & LePage, R. (2017). *Safe Sharps Disposal Toolkit. A Community Response to a Community Issue*. Retrieved from <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/Partners/HarmReduction/Documents/Safe%20Sharps%20Disposal%20Toolkit.pdf>
- Sudbury and District Health Unit. (2017). *Safe needle disposal*. Retrieved from [https://www.phsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Safe\\_Needle\\_Disposal\\_Toolkit\\_2018.pdf](https://www.phsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Safe_Needle_Disposal_Toolkit_2018.pdf)
- 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>

**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 4 of 2 |
| <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><br>Sudbury and District Health Unit [SDHU]. (2017). Safe needle disposal. Retrieved from the SDHU website: <a href="http://www.phsd.ca/">www.phsd.ca/</a> | <b>Approved By:</b>     |             |
|                       |   | <b>Signature:</b>       |             |

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**Policy:** To ensure staff safely dispose of sharps and/or drug equipment found in the community to keep staff 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 staff authorized to 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. Drug equipment such as cookers, filters, pipes and alcohol swabs should also be treated as sharps/health hazards.

**Background:** Discarded sharps in public places is a challenge that many communities face. People use sharps for a variety of reasons. “Some medical conditions require people to use needles such diabetes, cancer or arthritis. Others may use needles for medication to manage pain. People also use needles to inject drugs. When sharps are discarded in a community, it is often a result of not having a place to properly dispose of them. Most people will dispose of sharps safely if safe choices are made available” (Bridgeman & LePage, 2017, p.3).

When a person finishes using a sharp, some of that person’s blood may still be inside the needle or the syringe (Sudbury and District Health Unit [SDHU], 2017). If a person gets poked by another person’s used needle and the blood goes into their bloodstream, they could get sick with infections like Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C (SDHU, 2017). Most people will not get sick by picking up or getting poked by a used needle, but it is

extremely important to be cautious (SDHU, 2017). 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 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 injury and/or illness. The implementation of this policy will be monitored by management/supervisors.

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

1. Before proceeding with safe sharps disposal, assess the site of the found sharp/drug equipment for potential health hazards. Examples of possible health hazards include:
  - a. Additional sharps/drug equipment
  - b. Environmental hazards such as ice, water or fire hazards
  - c. 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. Obtain the Sharps Disposal Bin. This bin contains all of the equipment required to safely dispose of sharps including gloves, tongs and a regulated sharps container. *Include picture of organizational Sharps Disposal Bin below.*
2. Put on gloves to protect yourself. Do not handle sharps with hands. Gloves, tongs and closed toe shoes are required.
3. At the site of the found sharp/drug equipment, place the sharps container on a flat surface. In the case of a found needle, pick up the needle with tongs on the middle of the barrel of the needle with the sharp end facing down. Do not attempt to recap or break needle tips off. If multiple sharps are present, pick up one at a time.
4. Place the sharp in the sharps container sharp end first and shut the lid. If the sharps container is full, ensure lid is fully latched in the locked position. 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 bin.
5. Place sharps container in Sharps Disposal Bin. If transporting the bin, place in the rear of the vehicle.
6. Dispose of gloves and wash hands with warm soap and water or use alcohol based hand sanitizer.
7. Store the sharps container in a secure area. If the sharps container is full, put on gloves and prepare for biohazardous waste disposal as per organizational policy.
8. Notify supervisor of the location, a description of the found sharps/drug equipment and the action taken by the staff member.

**Supporting Documents:** *Link to Safe Sharps Disposal Training PPT, Best Practices to Support Safe Sharps Disposal in Non-Healthcare Settings and other related policies and procedures.*

**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>       |             |

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**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 or director.

- 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 Complete required organizational forms (e.g. Injury/Hazardous Situation Report, Serious Occurrence Reporting and Follow-Up Form, etc.) 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 require further assistance call the Infectious Diseases Program at the Grey Bruce Health Unit at 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456.
- 2.0 Upon injury and/or exposure to blood or bodily fluids from a known or unknown source, managers and directors 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 Receive required organizational forms 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

Visit the Grey Bruce Health Unit website to download the full electronic version.

# Safe Handling and Disposal of Sharps



## What is a Sharp?

- A sharp is any 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





Safe Sharps Disposal Example Social Media Posts

| Facebook/Twitter   | Image   | Link to Related Topic   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>A sharp is an object with sharp points or edges that can puncture or cut the skin, such as a needle. Watch the video to learn how to safely dispose of used sharps to keep your community safe.</p> |   | <p>Video on Safe Sharps Disposal:<br/> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo</a></p>  |
| <p>Found a needle? Follow these steps for safe disposal.</p>   |   | <p>Link to poster:<br/> <a href="https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Sharps_GBHU_2018.pdf">https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Sharps_GBHU_2018.pdf</a></p> |
| <p>Sharps containers are designed to hold used sharps/needles. They are made of puncture resistant material and can be closed or locked. Keep our community safe and use a sharps container.</p>       |  | <p>NA</p>   |
| <p>Happy first day of Spring! With warmer weather, you may find sharps/needles that were hidden by the snow. Here are the proper steps for disposal if you find a needle/sharp on your property.</p>   | <p>NA</p>   | <p>Video on Safe Sharps Disposal:<br/> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo</a></p>  |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>People use sharps/needles for a variety of reasons. Keep your community safe and properly dispose of sharps.</p>  |  <p><b>KEEP YOUR COMMUNITY SAFE</b></p> <p><b>USE A SHARPS CONTAINER</b></p> <p><small>Used sharps are hazardous waste. When not discarded properly they can cut and pierce skin. Instead of carrying the sharps to your disposal site, you need sharps in a sharps container. The sharps container may be available through your doctor, hospital, health insurance or medication supplier. You can also buy one from your pharmacist or online.</small></p>   | <p>Link to poster:<br/> <a href="https://www.publichealthgrebyruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/SharpDisposal.pdf">https://www.publichealthgrebyruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/SharpDisposal.pdf</a></p>       |
| <p>Watch this video to learn how to make your own sharps disposal kit.</p>   | <p>NA</p>   | <p>Video:<br/> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7tQc1wMHxg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7tQc1wMHxg</a></p>  |
| <p>Used sharps/needles should never be thrown directly in the trash or recycling as this may cause injury. Use a sharps container and return to a pharmacy for safe disposal. It's everyone's responsibility to keep our community safe.</p> |  <p><b>Be smart with sharps</b></p> <p>Keep our communities safe—use a sharps container!</p> <p><b>DO NOT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Throw loose sharps in garbage</li> <li>Put sharps in recycling bin</li> <li>Flush sharps down toilet</li> <li>Throw sharps in bushes or parks</li> </ul> <p><b>DO use a sharps container</b></p> <p><b>Steps to safe needle disposal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep all needles and drug equipment in compartments</li> <li>Do not try to recap the needle or break the tip off</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put on gloves to reduce contact from sharps and prevent sharps from piercing your skin.</li> <li>Bring a sharps container (one that is clearly marked with a biohazard symbol) to the sharps disposal site.</li> <li>Pick up the needle with the thumb and index finger. Do not touch the needle tip. Push the needle into the sharps container. Do not recap the needle. Do not break the needle. Do not bend the needle. Do not throw the needle in the trash.</li> <li>Check the needle in the sharps container. Do not touch the needle tip.</li> <li>Remove gloves and wash your hands with soap and water.</li> <li>For disposal: bring the sharps container to the sharps disposal site or your local pharmacy.</li> </ol> <p><b>I got poked by a needle. What do I do?</b></p> <p>Wash the area with soap and water. If you have a wound, wash the wound with soap and water. Apply a sterile bandage. If you have a puncture, apply a sterile bandage. If you have a laceration, apply a sterile bandage. If you have a deep puncture, seek medical attention.</p> <p><b>GREY BRUCE HEALTH UNIT</b><br/>     507 York Street, 2nd Floor, Grey, ON L8N 3Z2   www.publichealthgrebyruce.on.ca</p> | <p>Link to poster:<br/> <a href="https://www.publichealthgrebyruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Sharps_GBHU_2018.pdf">https://www.publichealthgrebyruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Sharps_GBHU_2018.pdf</a></p> |

## Safe Sharps Disposal Resources

- Be Smart with Sharps Poster:  
[https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Sharps\\_GBHU\\_2018.pdf](https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Sharps_GBHU_2018.pdf)
- Safe Sharps Disposal Video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo>
- How to Make a Sharps Disposal Kit/Cleaning and Disinfecting of Tongs:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7tQc1wMHxg>
- Grey Bruce Health Unit website (see Harm Reduction section):  
[www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca](http://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca)
- Toronto Public Health Resource on Needle Disposal: Guidance for Policies and Procedures: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/8dbc-Needle-Disposal-Guidance.pdf>