

IMPORTANT CURRICULUM UPDATE: PROPER DISPOSAL OF SHARPS

UPDATED 12/1/2012

There is an important update to the “How to Dispose of Sharps” section of Safety & Orientation, Home Care Aide Basic Training, and Accelerated Basic Training. Specifically, there are updates to the sharps disposal instructions that appear in the curriculum regarding proper sharps containers, labeling and disposal method. The updated safe disposal of sharps is listed below.

IMPORTANT

Different counties and cities in Washington state have different requirements for sharps disposal and workers are responsible for verifying that local requirement.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

WHAT ARE SHARPS?

Examples of sharps include:

- Needles** – hollow needles used to inject drugs (medication) under the skin
- Syringes** – devices with needles used to inject medication into or withdraw fluid from the body
- Lancets** – also called “fingerstick” devices – instruments with a short, two-edged blade used to get drops of blood for testing.
- Auto Injectors** – including epinephrine and insulin pens – syringes pre-filled with fluid medication designed to be self-injected
- Infusion sets** – tubing systems with a needle used to deliver drugs to the body.
- Connection needles/sets** – needles that connect to a tube used to transfer fluids in and out of the body.

WHY ARE USED SHARPS DANGEROUS?

- Injure people
- Spread germs
- Spread disease

PROPER HANDLING OF SHARPS

- Treat all sharps as if they are infectious.
- Put only sharps in the sharps container.
- When your sharps disposal container is about three-quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) full,

follow your community guidelines for proper disposal methods.

- Do not bend or break a needle.
- Do not put a cap on a used needle.
- Never take a used needle out of a syringe.
- Never use a needle more than once.

HOW TO DISPOSE OF SHARPS

- Wash your hands.
- Put on disposable gloves.
- Remove the lid of the sharps container (see acceptable containers below).
- Instruct the consumer to drop the sharps, needle first, into the container. If the consumer is unable to then use a tool such as tongs rather than handling directly.
- Replace the lid securely. If needed put tape on lid to secure it.
- Remove and properly dispose of gloves.
- Wash your hands.

SHARPS DISPOSAL CONTAINERS

- FDA-cleared sharps disposal containers are generally available through pharmacies, medical supply companies, health care providers, and online
- If an FDA-cleared container is not available, the FDA Sharps Disposal website offers the following guidance: Some organizations and community guidelines recommend using a heavy-duty plastic household container as an alternative. Household containers should also have the basic features of a good sharps disposal container described below.

All sharps disposal containers should be:

- made of a heavy-duty plastic;
- able to close with a tight-fitting, puncture-resistant lid, without sharps being able to come out;
- upright and stable during use;
- leak-resistant; and
- properly labeled to warn of hazardous waste inside the container.

Check with your local authority on approved disposal guidelines.

THE DANGERS OF SHARPS

A 44-year-old trash collector was stuck in the leg with a needle from someone's trash. A year



later, he started having stomach pains. His doctor told him that he had caught Hepatitis C, probably from being stuck by the needle.

Doctors have not been able to help him, and he is now in chronic liver failure. He will likely die from this disease.

It's not just trash workers who are at risk of needle sticks – it's also your neighbors, children, janitors, housekeepers, and pets.

That's why used needles should not be thrown in the garbage.

– Environmental Protection Agency

HOW TO DISPOSE OF A SHARPS CONTAINER

Home Care Aides are generally not responsible for disposal of consumer's sharp container. Home Care Aides should clarify with their employer if they are asked to do so by their consumer.

Once sharps container is $\frac{3}{4}$ full or ready for disposal:

- Seal the lid tightly with tape.
- Dispose of the sharps container at an approved sharps disposal location.

RESOURCES:

Find Wash. county Health Departments:

www.doh.wa.gov/!hjMap/LhJMap.htm

Safe Community Needle Disposal

1-800-643-1643

www.safeneedledisposal.org