



National Health & Safety Function, WHWU

SAFE USE & DISPOSAL OF SHARPS

FAST FACT, REF FF:008:01, MARCH 2019

The European Union (Prevention of Sharps injuries in the Healthcare Sector) Regulations 2014, define sharps as an object or instrument necessary for the exercise of specific healthcare activities, which are able to cut, prick or cause injury or infection. This includes equipment such as needles, blades (such as scalpels) and other sharp medical instruments.

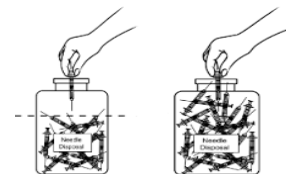
Risk Reduction Measures:

The legislation requires you to carry out a sharps risk assessment. Where the results of the risk assessment reveal a risk of injury and/or infection from sharps, control measures are required to put in place taking into consideration the following:

- **Eliminate** the unnecessary use of sharps - Are safe alternatives available?
- Provide medical devices incorporating safety engineered sharps protection mechanisms, where those mechanisms are available & appropriate. Needle free or needle safe devices should be used
- Handling of sharps should be kept to a minimum, used needles must never be recapped, passed from hand to hand, bent or broken
- Disposable gloves should be worn for all activities that carry a risk of exposure to blood or body fluids
- Sharps bins must be available at the point of use
- Never overfill a sharps bin, employees must not go over the “fill line” which is designed to prevent overfilling and accidental spillage of contents
- All sharps must be placed in a sharps container immediately after use
- Sharps containers should be assembled securely in accordance with manufacturer’s instructions, labeled, signed and dated



Place in the sharps container immediately after use!



Risk Reduction Measures:



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- Sharps containers must conform to UN Standard 3291
- The temporary closure mechanism on the sharps bin should be in place when not in use.
- All sharps containers must be tagged with a unique reference number which is traceable to the point of production
- Sharps containers awaiting collection must be stored in a secure locked location
- Where the risk assessment indicates that there is a risk of exposure to a biological agent for which an effective vaccine exists, the employer must offer the vaccine (free of charge) to the employee at risk
- Appropriate training is required to be provided to all employees who handle sharps
- Employees must adhere to safe working practices that are delivered during training
- Employees are required to report any accident or incident involving an exposure to the risk of injuries and/or infections from sharps
- Employees must follow local policies and procedures with regard to first aid arrangements



Additional Information:

[HSE Policy on the Management of Sharps and Prevention of Sharp Injuries 2020](#)

[Guide to the European Union Regulations 2014 \(Prevention of Sharps Injuries in the Healthcare Sector\)](#)