



Handling sharps and needles

Sharps are devices like needles, scalpels, and other tools that cut or go into the skin. Learning how to safely handle sharps is important to prevent accidental needle punctures and cuts.

Preventing Injuries

Before you use a sharp object, such as a needle or scalpel, make sure you have all the items you need close by. This includes items like alcohol swabs, gauze, and bandages. Minimal PPE when using needles includes safety glasses, long sleeved clothing and **clean** disposable gloves, thicker gloves are preferred for additional protection from puncture wounds. A sterile needle or blade presents puncture /abrasion hazards which can lead to excessive bleeding and even scarring.

It is **mandatory** to know the hazards of the material being injected/collected/cut by the needle assembly you will be using (exposure limits, health effects upon exposure). Chemical, biological safety training, and additional PPE amongst other considerations may be required to work with these materials. An incident with a contaminated sharp can be much more severe than with a sterile one due to the added potential for direct entry of a hazardous material into the body. A contaminated sharp injury can bypass any protection from one's skin and produce accelerated and enhanced hazardous effects of the material on the victim.

Also, know where the sharps disposal container is. Check to make sure there is enough room in the container for your object to fit. It should **never** be more than two-thirds full.

Some sharps have a protective device, such as a needle shield, sheath, or blunting, that you activate after you remove the needle from the person. This allows you to handle the sharp safely, without the risk of exposing yourself to the material being handled. If you are using this kind of sharp, make sure you know how it works before you use it.

In the event of a sharps exposure, it must be reported via the UBC Centralized Accident/Incident Reporting System: CAIRS (https://www.cairs.ubc.ca/public_page.php)

Uncapping Sharps (Needles)

BEFORE STARTING YOUR SHARPS WORK, ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE AN APPROPRIATE SHARPS DISPOSAL CONTAINER TO DISCARD USED SHARPS AND ARE AWARE OF THE HAZARDS OF THE MATERIAL YOU WILL BE INJECTING/COLLECTING BY NEEDLE.

When possible, using an uncapping device is the safest way to uncap needles, as it permits the user to uncap the needle with one hand on the syringe portion of the assembly with no chance of coming in contact with the needle.

If no capping device is available:

- Be sure to assemble the syringe-needle assembly before uncapping.
- After assembly, hold the syringe with one hand, and the needle cap as close to the tip of the needle cap as practically possible.
- Twist the cap loose from the needle to avoid rebound and possible stabbing. This may require carefully holding the base of the needle as opposed to the syringe.
- Once the cap is loose, ensure there is room to draw each hand away from the other and safely uncap the needle.

Using Sharps

Follow these guidelines when you work with sharps.

- Do not uncover, unwrap or uncap the sharp until it is time to use it.
- Keep the object pointed away from yourself and other people at all times.
- Avoid to recap or bend a sharp object.
- If recapping is needed, use a recapping device or one-hand scoop technique.
- Keep your fingers, hands and body away from the tip of the sharp.
- If the sharp is reusable, put it in a secure, closed container after you use it.
- Never hand a sharp to someone else or put it on a tray for another person to pick up.
- If possible, segregate sharps work from other people.
- If working in close proximity to others is unavoidable, tell the people you are working around when you plan to set the sharp down or pick it up.
- If you must transport a sharp, ensure that it is recapped (see above one-hand scoop technique) before moving from the current workstation to the next.
- Dispose of the sharp immediately after. If the sharp must be reused, employ a guard.

Sharps Disposal

Dispose of sharps in dedicated sharps disposal containers, regardless of their amount of contamination. Make sure the disposal container is made for disposing of sharps (puncture resistant). Replace containers when they are **two-thirds full**. Central EHS will both provide sharps disposal containers, as well as take full containers <https://hwis.srs.ubc.ca/wisoc/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fwisoc%2fuserapp%2fcwisApp.aspx> .

Other important tips include:

- Never put your fingers into the sharps container.
- If a needle has tubing attached to it, hold the needle and the tubing when you put it in the sharps container.
- Sharps containers should be at eye level and within your reach.
- If a sharp is sticking out of the container, do not push it in with your hands: use tongs.
- If you find an uncovered sharp object outside of a disposal container, it is safe to pick it up only if you can grasp the non-sharp end. If you cannot, use tongs to pick it up and dispose of it.