

Educator Talking Points

What is a sharp?

Describe what a sharp is and give examples:

- A sharp is any object that has the ability to puncture or cut someone or something.
- For example: hypodermic needles or syringes (medical needles or syringes that are used on people), lancets, scalpel blades, broken glass, sharp edge materials, knives, razor blades and any other item that may cut or puncture the skin and may have been contaminated by blood or bodily fluids.
- Some sharps are more likely to have been contaminated with blood or bodily fluids (e.g., needles, glass pipes, razors, or lancets). These should be disposed of as biohazardous waste.
- Other sharps (e.g., knives or broken glass) can be safely disposed of in a way that they are packed securely and will not break through the container during regular waste disposal.

You can also show students pictures of sharps so they know what they are.

What do you do if you find a sharp?

JK - Grade 6

Younger students (JK-grade 6) should be taught to not touch sharps. Some key points to talk about:

- Treat all sharps and drug equipment like they are contaminated
- Don't touch needles or other sharp objects
- Needles on the ground can be sharp and unsafe
- Ask an adult for help
- Make sure your friends stay away from a sharp on the ground

Grade 7-12

Older students (grades 7-12) who find a sharp on school property should still tell a staff member. Older students who find a sharp on their own private property or on public property might be able to safely pick up and dispose of the sharp if they are comfortable doing so. Some general safety guidelines to talk about:

- Treat all sharps and drug equipment like they are contaminated
- Ask an adult for help if you do not feel comfortable picking up a sharp
- Do not touch the sharp end of a needle
- Do not try to recap needles or break the tip off
- Do not flush sharps down the toilet or put them in the garbage or recycling box
- You can avoid an injury and infection by proceeding with caution

Steps for the safest way to pick up and dispose of a sharp:

1. You will need a hard-sided container with a lid (e.g., sharps container, pop bottle, laundry soap bottle, Mason jar, or coffee can), some puncture-proof or disposable gloves (if available), and a set of tongs.
2. Place the container on a flat, stable surface.
3. Put on puncture-proof or disposable gloves, if you have them. Disposable gloves will protect you from fluid contamination, but they will not protect against punctures or cuts. If you don't have disposable gloves just be sure to wash your hands immediately after handling the sharp.
4. Pick up the sharp using tongs. If you do not have tongs and are comfortable, pick up the sharp by the middle of the plastic tube (if it is a needle) with the sharp end facing down and away from you.
5. Place the sharp into the container with the sharp end pointing down.
6. Close the lid of the container tightly and secure it with tape if possible. Write the word "Sharps" on the container to caution others from opening the container.
7. Remove disposable gloves and throw them in the garbage.
8. If puncture-proof gloves or tongs were used, wipe them down with a disinfectant wipe and allow them to air dry.
9. Wash your hands with soap and water.
10. If the sharp is the type (listed above) that is likely to have been contaminated with blood or bodily fluids, place the container in a community sharps bin or bring it to a local needle syringe program (e.g., at the health unit), local hazardous waste depot, or a participating pharmacy (pharmacies will only accept sharps in a biohazard container). If the sharp is not likely to have been contaminated with blood or bodily fluids (e.g., broken window), it can be disposed of as regular waste as long as it is packed securely and will not break through the container. You could also give the sealed container to an adult.

I got poked by a sharp. What do I do?

- Remain calm. Allow the wound to bleed freely (do not press or squeeze the wound). Wash the wound with soap and water (alcohol swabs are not recommended for this type of injury). Apply a sterile, waterproof bandage. Seek immediate medical attention by calling your physician or going to the hospital's Emergency Department.