

Safe Work Practices for Preventing Sharps Injuries

Work practices to prevent sharps injuries are typically presented as a list of specific practices to avoid (e.g., recapping used needles) or to use (e.g., disposing in appropriate sharps disposal containers). As data on the epidemiology of sharps injuries has shown, the risk of a sharps injury begins at the moment a sharp is first exposed and ends once the sharp is permanently removed from exposure in the work environment. Therefore, to promote safe work practices, healthcare/research personnel need to have an awareness of the risk of injury throughout the time a sharp is exposed and use a combination of strategies to protect themselves and their co-workers throughout the handling of the device. The following is a suggested list of practices that reflect this concept and can be adapted as necessary to any healthcare/research environment.

Work Practices to Prevent Sharps Injuries Throughout the Use and Handling of a Device

Before the beginning of a procedure that involves the use of a needle or other sharp device:

- Ensure that equipment necessary for performing a procedure is available within arms reach.
- Assess the work environment for adequate lighting and space to perform the procedure.
- If multiple sharps will be used during a procedure, organize the work area (e.g. procedure tray) so that the sharp is always pointed away from the operator.
 - Identify the location of the sharps disposal container; if moveable, place it as close to the point-of-use as appropriate for immediate disposal of the sharp. If the sharp is reusable, determine in advance where it will be placed for safe handling after use.
- Assess the potential for the animal to be uncooperative, combative, or confused. Obtain assistance from other staff to assist as necessary.
- Ensure proper personal protective equipment is being used.

During a Procedure That Involves the Use of Needles or Other Sharp Devices:

- Maintain visual contact with the procedure site and location of the sharp device.
- When handling an exposed sharp, be aware of other staff in the immediate environment and take steps to control the location of the sharp to avoid injury to oneself and other staff.
- Do not hand-pass exposed sharps from one person to another; use a predetermined neutral zone or tray for placing and retrieving used sharps. Verbally announce when sharps are being placed in a neutral zone.

- If the procedure necessitates reusing a needle multiple times on the same animal (e.g., giving local anesthesia), recap the needle between steps using a one-handed technique or a fixed device that enables one-handed recapping.
- If using an engineered sharps injury prevention device, activate the safety feature as the procedure is being completed, observing for audio or visual cues that the feature is locked in place.

During Clean-up Following a Procedure:

- Visually inspect procedure trays, or other surfaces containing waste materials used during a procedure, for the presence of sharps that may have been left inadvertently after the procedure.
- Transport reusable sharps in a closed container that has been secured to prevent the spillage of contents.

During Disposal:

- Visually inspect the sharps container for hazards caused by overfilling.
- Make sure the sharps container being used is large enough to accommodate the entire device.
- Avoid bringing the hands close to the opening of a sharps container; never place hands or fingers into a container to facilitate disposal of a device.
- Keep the hands behind the sharp tip when disposing the device.

After Disposal:

- Visually inspect sharps containers for evidence of overfilling before removal. If a sharps container is overfilled, obtain a new container and use forceps or tongs to remove protruding devices and place them in the new container.
- Visually inspect the outside of waste containers for evidence of protruding sharps. If found, notify safety personnel for assistance in removing the hazard.
- Keep filled sharps containers awaiting final disposal in a secure area. Improperly Disposed Sharps:
- If an improperly disposed sharp is encountered in the work environment, handle the device carefully, keeping the hands behind the sharp at all times.
- Use a mechanical device to pick up the sharp if it cannot be performed safely by hand.

I have been trained on the proper techniques for the procedure that will use a sharp and have read and understand the Safe Work Practices for Preventing Sharps Injuries document. I will contact my Supervisor, Environmental Health and Safety and complete an incident report if a needle stick occurs.

Signature of Lab personal

Date

Signature of Primary Investigator