

What are sharps?

Needles, blades, glass ampoules, broken glass, and any other instrument that can cause injury by cutting, pricking or otherwise penetrating/puncturing the skin.

What is a sharps injury?

An injury caused by a sharp penetrating or puncturing the skin. The sharp may be sterile or contaminated with biological, chemical or radioactive material.

Work activities where sharps will be used must be fully risk assessed before work commences. Adequate control measures should be used. It is essential to include what action should be taken should an injury occur from a contaminated sharp.

Who is at risk?

- Those who directly handle sharps eg laboratory workers, phlebotomists, healthcare providers.
- Those put at risk when sharps are not stored or disposed of correctly e.g. cleaners, contractors, co-workers, including other staff, students.
- Human volunteer subjects in the laboratory.
- Outside of the healthcare and laboratory settings, sharps may be used both for legal/legitimate and illegal reasons. They may be found in unexpected places posing a risk to people such as gardeners, plumbers, cleaners etc.

What are the risks?

In the laboratory setting there is a potential risk from:

- Injection of chemical, radioactive, biological material
- Infectious agents
- Tissue used in experiments
- Working with unscreened human blood

When working with human blood, bodily fluids there is the potential risk of exposure to blood-borne viruses (BBVs). The main BBVs are:

- Hepatitis B (HBV)
- Hepatitis C (HCV)
- Human Immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

These viruses can also be found in body fluids other than blood, for example, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk. Other body fluids or materials such as urine, faeces, saliva, sputum, sweat, tears and vomit carry a minimal risk of BBV infection, unless they are contaminated with blood. However care should always be taken as the presence of blood is not always obvious.

What are the Control measures?

- Eliminate or avoid the use of sharps wherever possible
- Follow a safe system of work where necessary
- Safer sharps should be used for higher risk activities where there could be exposure to human blood, infectious material, chemical, radioactive, or biological material which could cause harm
- Ensure adequate environmental factors including good lighting to carry out procedures involving sharps
- **DO NOT** re-sheath needles
- Wear appropriate PPE including sharps resistant gloves if necessary
- Change gloves after each procedure or patient
- Wash hands after removing gloves
- Cover all exposed broken skin with secure waterproof dressing
- Hepatitis B vaccination must be offered if work includes exposure to blood or human tissues
- Safe disposal – see detail below
- Provision of adequate information, instruction and training

Safe disposal

- NEVER re-sheath a needle.
- Dispose of sharps immediately after use into designated rigid sharps disposal containers.
- Always take the sharps disposal container to the point of use.
- Place the sharps disposal container within easy arm's reach.
- Do not overfill the sharps disposal container.
- Seal and discard sharps containers via clinical waste when they are three quarters full.



First Aid

In the event of a sharps injury occurring:

- Gently encourage the wound to bleed by applying pressure below the puncture mark for a few minutes. Do not suck the wound.
- Wash the wound under running water whilst encouraging bleeding. Wash with soap.
- Do not scrub the wound.
- Apply a clean dry dressing.
- If the sharp was contaminated:
 - 1) Contact the University Occupational Health Service.
 - 2) Seek advice from the nearest A&E department if there is a BBV / infectious disease risk, and inform them that the University Occupational Health Service do not offer BBV prophylaxis or treatment.



The nearest A&E department to the John Anderson Campus:

Glasgow Royal Infirmary
84 Castle Street, Glasgow, G4 0SF.

Additional reference material:

- **Health and Safety Executive Sharps Injuries**
www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/needlesticks
- **Health Services Information Sheet**
Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hsis7.pdf>
- **Sharps Safety**
RCN Guidance to support the implementation of the Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare Regulations) 2013
[Sharps safety | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](http://www.rcn.org.uk/sharps-safety)

For further information contact: Your Departmental Safety Convenor

University Biological Safety Adviser
t: 0141 548 5740
e: biosafety@strath.ac.uk

Occupational Health Service
t: 0141 548 4824
e: occupationalhealth@strath.ac.uk

Reporting

- Report the injury/incident to Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing using the [SIRIS incident reporting webform](#).



University Occupational Health and Safety

Safe Use of Sharps Information Sheet

