

Gwynedd Mercy University Sharps Safety Facts



What are sharps?

Sharps are a general term for all types of instruments or materials that have points or sharp edges capable of puncturing or cutting the skin. Needles, syringes, razor blades, scalpel blades and biologically contaminated broken glass are all examples of sharps. These items are routinely generated in laboratories and need to be properly handled and discarded. In most states, Pasteur pipettes are defined as a sharp, regardless of whether or not they are contaminated.

General Practices:

Dispose of sharps (including biologically contaminated broken glassware) in an infectious waste sharps container. Infectious waste sharps containers should be placed near areas of sharps waste generation. Clean broken glassware can be placed into the standard broken glassware boxes. Inspect sharps containers weekly and relocate to the CSA when $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Infectious waste sharps containers are placed directly into biological waste boxes provided by our vendor.

Sharps containers must be non-breakable, leak proof, impervious to moisture, rigid, tightly lidded, puncture resistant, red in color and marked with the universal biohazard symbol. An example is pictured above.

In addition to sharps being a direct injury hazard, contaminated sharps pose a risk of infection by any number of agents. Injuries due to contaminated sharps are of concern because of the severity of health effects associated with exposure. Employees must take precautions to prevent sharps injuries at all times and follow the Biohazard Waste Management Plan set forth by the college.

What precautions should I take?

Always use Universal Precaution principles. Assume that all contaminated sharps are infectious and treat them accordingly. Removing sharps from the procedure altogether is one of the best ways to reduce sharps injuries. Consider safe alternatives for sharps devices and substitute plastic for glassware whenever possible.

When working with sharps:

- Discard contaminated sharps immediately into a sharps container.
- Never fill sharps containers more than $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Do not force a sharp into a container or attempt to retrieve a sharp from a container.
- Never bend, break, shear or remove needles from syringes.
- Do not recap needles or syringes by hand.
- Only work with one uncapped needle at a time, keeping other sharps in view.
- Do not place a needle cap in your mouth in order to remove the cap.
- Do not leave sharps unattended.
- Avoid handling broken glassware by hand. Use tongs, forceps or another device to indirectly retrieve the broken glass.

What if I am injured by a sharp?

1. Wash injury with soap and water for several minutes
2. Report the incident to your supervisor and the Environmental Safety Manager
3. To obtain medical attention, report to Health Services immediately
4. For off-hours or severe injuries, report immediately, to the nearest hospital.