



July 2018 TOPIC # 6

REDUCING EXPOSURE INCIDENTS

An exposure in the healthcare setting occurs where body fluid from one person e.g. blood, enters broken skin or mucous membranes of another. A sharp is broadly defined as an item that can pierce the container it is disposed to and includes unbroken glass vials. Currently, Vic EPA includes syringes as sharps (to prevent disconnecting needles).

The following can lead to exposures and must be avoided:

- Recapping needles
- Transporting exposed used sharps on an open tray
- Manually disconnecting needles from syringes
- Compressing clinical waste bags which may result in splash of contents
- Pressing down on protruding sharps in overfilled sharps bins – points can break through under force
- Decanting contents of one clinical waste bag or sharps bin to another
- Injury from leaving sharps wrapped in gauze etc
- Not knowing that glucose lancets and intact glass vials are defined as sharps
- Placing wall-mounted sharps bins with the opening too high
- Placing sharps bins on the floor or on a low bench or unmounted
- Not wearing face protection when body fluid splash is anticipated
- Carrying loose clinical waste or inadequately contained waste through the practice
- Disposal of items that can pierce bags and cause leakage of body fluids.
- Carrying single bagged clinical waste (these may leak from misplaced sharps)

Injuries may result from lack of knowledge. Consider these further preventatives:

- Use safety engineered medical devices (SEMDs) where available and ensure staff know how to activate the safety mechanism (audit to ensure this)
- Staff education about sharps identification, safe disposal and waste treatment
- Place mounted sharps bins at point of use to avoid carrying sharps any distance.
- Tie waste bags at the neck with cable ties to avoid contact with misplaced sharps
- Seal sharps bin when it reaches the fill line
- Keep spare sharps bins at hand to avoid overfilling
- Seal/lock full sharps bins before removing them from mounts
- Avoid carrying sharps bins against the body - hold away from the body
- Wear safety glasses or face protection when body fluid splash is a possibility
- Wear gloves during venepuncture and performing finger pricks – gloves can reduce injected volume
- Replacing a bag when it is two thirds full
- Ensure the shortest staff who use sharps bins can see the bin opening – standard is 1.3m above ground
- Do not carry full single bagged clinical waste bags - bring a bin or second bag to site

Note that it is mandatory to report an exposure incident and that 45% of sharps' exposures occur at point of disposal.

NEXT MONTH - YOUR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO EXPOSURE

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