

AVOIDING NEEDLESTICK AND SHARPS INJURIES

Needlesticks and sharps injuries from hypodermic needles, iv catheters, suture needles, and scalpel blades are common in veterinary practices.

GUIDELINES FOR REDUCING YOUR EXPOSURE TO INJURIES

- Before you begin a procedure involving sharp devices, make sure you have a stable work surface and a sharps disposal container immediately available.
- Place approved puncture-resistance sharps containers in exam and procedure rooms, but keep them out of reach of children.
- Get assistance when giving an injection, starting an IV, or drawing blood from any animal. Work together to maintain the extra degree of safety achieved when a second employee is assisting with an invasive or painful procedure.
- Immediately dispose of used needles and sharps directly into approved sharps containers. Do not use temporary or unapproved containers, such as empty plastic bottles.
- Place sharps containers at or below eye level so you can see the disposal slot before moving your hand toward it.
- Do not walk around with uncapped needles, such as in lab coat pockets.
- Avoid hand-to-hand transfer of sharps between veterinary personnel. Place sharps on a suitable surface for retrieval by the other person.
- When surgical procedures are performed outside of the surgical suite, utilize the neutral or safe zone concept standard in the surgical suite. Carefully organize sharps on a tray or another designated area, to be retrieved by the user.
- Do not recap needles unless absolutely necessary. If recapping is necessary, hold the cap with a mechanical device such as forceps, use a needle recapping device, or place the cap on a flat surface and slide the needle into the cap.
- Replace sharps disposal containers when the contents reach the fill line. Do not overfill them.
- Assign specific individuals to routinely inspect and replace sharps containers as needed.
- Never reach into a sharps container or attempt to compact its contents.
- Utilize needle-removal devices on sharps containers or tools, as necessary, to remove needles from syringes prior to disposal.
- Consider the use of protective devices such as retractable needles or hinged syringe caps for safer injection and blood collection procedures. These devices include re-sheathable winged steel (butterfly) needles that withdraw into a protective sheath after use, retractable or blunable needles, and hinged recapping sheaths. Needleless IV systems are also available to help reduce needlestick injuries associated with injection into IV line ports.
- Report all needlesticks and other sharps-related accidents. Record accident information to discuss during training sessions.
- Account for all sharps prior to dismantling a surgery pack for cleaning.
- Do not handle sharp objects such as needles or scalpel blades while distracted. Stay focused on the task at hand and avoid dividing your attention until after the sharp object has been placed in a sharps container.

NEEDLESTICK AND SHARPS SAFETY QUESTIONS

Q. What are the hospital's procedures for avoiding needlesticks and other sharps-related accidents?

A. Discuss the practices for handling sharps during specific procedures performed in the hospital to avoid related injuries.

Q. What are the hospital's procedures for disposing needles and sharps?

A. Discuss the practices for handling sharps during specific procedures performed in the hospital to avoid related injuries.

Q. What should you do when you notice a sharps disposal container is full?

A. Discuss who is responsible for inspecting and replacing sharps containers and the communication process to ensure that adequate sharps containers are available when and where they are needed.

Q. Can improvements be made in the hospital to decrease the risk of punctures or lacerations involving sharps and other objects?A. Discuss any sharps-related accidents that have occurred and steps to prevent their reoccurrence.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES

Center For Disease Control Sharps Safety for Healthcare Settings: <https://www.cdc.gov/sharpssafety/index.html>

NASPHV Compendia for Standard Precautions for Zoonotic Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel:
<http://www.nasphv.org/Documents/VeterinaryStandardPrecautions.pdf> (Needlestick Injury Prevention p. 1260.)

Needlestick Injuries in Veterinary Practice (Weese & Jack) Canadian Veterinary Journal:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2465782/>

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