



Harvard University Sharps Safety Fact Sheet

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. Under Massachusetts law, 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 discard when $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Infectious waste sharps containers are placed directly into biological waste boxes (burn boxes), if they contain uncontaminated or BL1 level waste. Sharps containers with BL2 or BL3 waste must be autoclaved prior to being placed into a burn box.

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 below:



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.

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
 3. Obtain medical attention and report to University Health Services (UHS) immediately or the nearest emergency room.
 4. For off-hours or severe injuries, report immediately to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- In Longwood, report to UHS at 275 Longwood Avenue from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Call in advance at (617) 432-1370 when possible.
 - In Cambridge/Allston, report to UHS, Holyoke Center, 75 Mt. Auburn Street. Call in advance at (617) 495- 5711 when possible.

Where can I get sharps containers?

On the Longwood campus, sharps containers can be ordered, free of charge, from the EH&S Biosafety Office. Standard sharps container sizes are 2 and 6 gallons. Call (617) 432-1720 to have them delivered or order online at: https://www.uos.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/ehs/ehs-bin/hw_services.pl

On the Cambridge campus, labs can purchase sharps containers directly from VWR: (800) 932-5000 or www.vwr.com.

For more information, please call the EH&S Department at 617-495-2060 for Cambridge/Allston or 617-432-1720 for Longwood.