

Introduction

This standard outlines the necessary procedures and safety measures for the retrieval and disposal of hypodermic needles, sharps, syringes, and associated drug paraphernalia such as foils, spoons, plastic bottles, and cans. This includes the use of a sharps disposal kit, which should be available in all KCC establishments and schools, to ensure the safe handling and disposal of these items to prevent accidental injuries and promote a safe environment

Reported findings by KCC employees of discarded needles, syringes and other drugs-related litter are rare, and needle stick injuries are even rarer. Being prepared for the unexpected and knowing how to respond and act makes us more able to prevent ourselves and others from becoming the victim of an accidental injury.

Aims

- Identify and assess sources of risk
- Facilitate the safe removal and disposal of discarded needles and syringes
- Maintain suitable and sufficient records of the precautions implemented.
- reduce the risk of injury.

Legal requirement

- The Health and Safety at work Act 1974 (HASAWA)
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR)
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 2002
- Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013

What are needle stick injuries and sharps?

Needle-stick injuries are wounds caused by needles or other sharps that accidentally puncture the skin. Exposure to blood-borne viruses is the major hazard of needle stick injuries, especially the viruses that cause HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, as well as other diseases such as tetanus.

The term 'sharps' means objects or devices with sharp points, protuberances or cutting edges that are capable of cutting or piercing the skin.

Types of needles sticks

- Needles, such as hypodermic needles, suture needles, acupuncture needles, intravenous catheters, and lancets

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Types of Sharps

- Scalpels, razors, and other surgical blades
- Glass or plastic ampoules, vials, or tubes that can break or shatter
- Dental wires, drills, burs, and endodontic files
- Metal staples, nails, screws, and pins
- Broken glassware and ceramics
- Scissors, knives, and other cutting tools

Who should follow this health and safety standard?

This standard applies to all Kent County Council employees and Contractors working on behalf of the Council. This standard complements the Health and Safety Standards such as the Risk Profiling Standard, Risk Assessment Standard and Accident, Incident, Near miss reporting Standards and procedures.

Management expectations within KCC – responsibilities:

Directors and Senior managers

Directors and Senior managers are responsible for ensuring the effective operation of this standard within their Service. They are also responsible for ensuring that adequate resources are made available to implement appropriate protective measures where risk assessments have indicated that these will be required.

Heads of Service and Head Teachers must:

Heads of Service and Head Teachers are responsible, so far as is reasonably practicable, for ensuring the health, safety & care at work of all employees and others in their respective services. Heads of Service and Head Teachers will:

- Develop, implement and regularly review the risk assessments and procedures for needle-stick injuries specific to their Service and their working environments
- Ensure all employees are aware of these risk assessments and procedures
- Determine the management arrangements, within their Service, through which these will be implemented and communicated

Managers must:

All managers who have operational responsibility for employees and for implementing safe systems and procedures of work will be specifically responsible for ensuring that:

- The HSS015 Biological Hazards, Needles and Syringes Standard is effectively implemented, monitored, and reviewed in the area/activities under their supervision
- All employees are aware of and understand the standard and procedures contained within it

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- Safe systems of work are implemented, and all working procedures and practices are properly documented and adhered to
- All work activities carried out by Kent County Council employees are risk assessed and procedures implemented which present as low a risk as practicably possible to employees and other parties
- Appropriate safety equipment, including personal protective equipment (PPE), is supplied, properly maintained and used at all times
- Relevant health, safety & care training is provided to all employees to enable them to carry out their duties in a competent manner
- All necessary arrangements are made and maintained in respect of accident reporting, first aid, access to Occupational Health and counselling if appropriate
- The Accident/Incident Procedure is adhered to, including the reporting and investigation of incidents, and that remedial action is taken, where appropriate

Employees must:

It is vital that all employees of Kent County Council contribute positively to the successful management of health, safety & care. To ensure the effective implementation of this standard employees will be expected to:

- Safeguard their own health and safety, and that of others, by operating to the safe systems of work in accordance with this Needle-stick standard and other Kent County Council Policies
- Wear/use P.P.E as instructed by their manager
- Alert line managers to unsafe practices, conditions or incidents of concern
- Report any findings of a discarded needle-stick to their line-manager
- Report accidents/incidents to their line manager as soon as possible.
- Attend relevant training as instructed by their manager
- Follow the procedures for dealing with needle-stick incidents as contained in this standard and as advised to them by their manager

Summary

This standard provides guidance on how to prevent and manage sharps and needle stick injuries in the workplace. Sharps and needle stick injuries can expose workers to blood borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, which can have serious health consequences. Therefore, workers should:

- Use safe handling and disposal methods for sharps and needles
- Wear appropriate relevant personal protective equipment such as gloves and goggles and safety shoes
- Report any injury or exposure incident to their manager and seek medical advice
- Attend relevant training as instructed by their manager
- Follow the procedures for dealing with needle-stick incidents as contained in this standard and as advised by their manager

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By following this standard, workers can protect themselves and others from the risk of infection and ensure a safe and healthy work environment.

Additional information

BLOOD BORNE VIRUSES

These are transmitted when contaminated blood or other body fluids enters the body of a susceptible person. These viruses are not transmitted through every day social contact with an infected person. A safe working practice should always be adopted to prevent exposure to blood borne viruses.

Bloodborne viruses include HIV, hepatitis B and C. Many individuals infected with these viruses may not have any signs of infection and may not know they are infected.

Hepatitis simply means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis B and C are only some of the viruses that can affect the liver, long term infection can lead to severe liver damage.

HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system gradually depleting it. AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) can only develop in someone who is HIV positive. A person has AIDS when their immune system has become so weak that it can no longer fight off a range of infections with which it would normally cope.

Risk assessment process

It is important to assess the risk of removal of any sharp's objects found when considering what action is required:

- Is it safe for you to attempt removal? You must not take avoidable risks, if you are unsure, discuss what action to take with your line manager or headteacher
- the area where the object is found must be safeguarded to protect others from injury
- if the discovery is made of a needle or sharps when you are alone, and children/young people or others are nearby, summon help by asking someone to get the sharps disposal kit while you 'stand guard'
- for KCC establishments including schools, the incident must be recorded on the online HS157 accident/incident form.

Guidance for the disposal of needle/syringe into a sharp's container

There is not one size fits all for protective clothing that should be used for removing needles and sharps. There is a trade-off to be made between ease of handling equipment and protection against injury. For this reason, it is recommended that the type of glove (and other PPE) chosen varies with the situation in which needles and sharps are found, or suspected. In all situations, the following safe system of work and procedure should be followed:

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- Suitable tools, such as tongs, dustpans and brushes, should be used to move used needles wherever possible;
- Only if this is not possible should gloved hands be used;
- Gloves should always be worn when dealing with discarded sharps, even when using tools – there is always the possibility of accidental hand contact with the needle whilst using the tools;
- Gloves should afford a suitable level of protection from possible puncture from the needle; and
- Gloves are unlikely to offer 100% protection, and employees should be made aware of this.

In all cases, appropriate sharps containers should be in place and ready to receive needles before any moving or handling begins.

Procedure	Precautions
<i>Step 1</i> Put on suitable PPE gloves (if available). Gloves will not prevent the wearer from being injured but will form a clean barrier between the hands and the syringe.	Do not attempt to recap the needle – this is how most accidental needle-stick injuries happen. The cap is usually bright orange and can be disposed of separately. Do not break, bend or otherwise try to render the syringe useless.
<i>Step 2</i> Bring your rigid-walled, puncture resistant, sealable, sharps container to the syringe.	Take the sharps container to the syringe, do not walk with the needle/syringe.
<i>Step 3</i> Place the container on the ground or flat surface beside the syringe.	Do not hold the sharps container or ask another person to hold it as you are disposing of the syringe.
<i>Step 4</i> Pick up the syringe by the middle of the barrel.	Pick up the barrel of syringe using the appropriate tongs and deposit the offending article into your Sharps container, without directly handling it. Note Do not use a dustpan & brush to 'sweep up' the syringe as the sweeping movement can cause the syringe to flick into the air and cause further risk.
<i>Step 5</i> Place the syringe in the container sharp end first.	Keep the sharp end of the needle facing away from you at all times.
<i>Step 6</i> Securely place the lid on the container and ensure it is sealed. Hold the container by the top when carrying.	Once the area has been cleared of any offending needles and these have been safely stored in the Sharps container, LOCK it before returning it to a safe storage space. Needles while stored in these Sharps containers are quite safe because

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	they are not easy to retrieve once placed in the container and locked.
<i>Step 7</i> Remove gloves carefully so any contaminated fluid on the glove does not come into contact with your hand. Wash your hands with running water and soap.	Other items that have come into contact with blood (i.e. gloves) should be placed into double plastic bags and then into suitable waste bin.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and equipment needed for retrieval

- sharps container
- small tongs
- disposable gloves / needlestick resistant gloves
- safety shoes
- disinfectant wipe
- disposal bag for gloves, tong

Removal procedure:

- close and safeguard the area until the sharps disposal kit has been collected
- follow the procedure outlined in the sharps disposal kit
- if the sharps kit is unavailable, **never** place a needle in a bin without first placing it in a hard-protective container to avoid injury
- report the discovery to the local Police
- if isolated needles or syringes are found, the surrounding area must also be checked **carefully**. In doing so, **do not comb the grass by hand**.
- neither children nor adults should be permitted to enter an area where syringes or needles have been found repeatedly unless that area has been fully checked before it is used.

First aid treatment

If an accident occurs where a needle or other sharp object has punctured the skin, the injured person should follow the advice below:

- remain calm
- gently encourage the wound to bleed, ideally holding it under running water **DO NOT SUCK THE WOUND**
- wash the wound using running water and plenty of soap
- dry the wound and cover it with a waterproof plaster or dressing
- seek medical attention as soon as possible e.g. from their own doctor or a hospital accident and emergency department, there is no requirement to take the needle or sharp with you
- inform their manager

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- complete the KCC online HS157 accident/incident and HS160 investigation forms – managers should investigate the circumstances and causes of the incident and take any action required.

An immediate response taken by the injured person can help reduce the risk of infection.

RIDDOR reporting

Sharps injuries must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 when:

- an employee is injured by a sharp known to be contaminated with a blood-borne virus (BBV) e.g. hepatitis B or C, or HIV (this is reportable as a dangerous occurrence)
- the employee receives a sharps injury and a BBV acquired by this route seroconverts (this is reportable as a disease)
- the injury causes the employee to be absent from work for over 7 days.

See RIDDOR reporting on the Health and Safety Executive's website for further guidance.

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