

Safety Note #113

PREVENTING UNINTENTIONAL NEEDLESTICKS



Syringe and Needle
Photograph Courtesy of Hopland REC

Information available from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) indicate about 600,000 to 800,000 unintentional needlesticks occur to health care workers annually. The potential for unintentional needlesticks is also present at ANR workplaces where needles are used in laboratory procedures and as part of animal vaccination or research protocols. Failure to properly dispose of needles also increases likelihood of needlestick injuries. Unintentional needlesticks may result in animal to human disease transmission, injection of harmful chemicals, or infection of puncture wounds.

Needle Handling Precautions

- Safe use of needles requires familiarity and experience in handling needles. All employees must be trained and comfortable with handling needles prior to using them in job tasks.
- When possible, substitute use of needles for other safer methods and minimize the amount of time spent handling syringes with needles to effectively reduce your exposure to needlesticks.
- Always wear suitable personal protective equipment, such as gloves, protective eyewear, lab coats or coveralls, and/or face shields, when using a syringe with a needle.
- Carefully remove the disposable syringe with capped needle from its packaging. Always keep a needle capped until you are ready to fill a syringe and/or begin an injection.
- Avoid “line of fire” injuries by making sure that hands or body parts are not in the path of the needle if you miss or poke through the intended target. When injecting animals, firmly hold or secure the animal and inject the needle in a motion that is directed away from your body or appendages.
- If resistance is encountered, do not attempt to force a needle into the intended target site. Select a new target site and firmly and smoothly insert the needle.
- Following completion of an injection task, wash your hands with soap and water.
- Do not cut needles or replace the needle cap before disposing of the syringe with needle in a hard-walled sharps container. If needles must be recapped, train employees in one-handed re-capping techniques.
- Do not overfill the hard-walled sharps container. When contents reach the fill line, containers must be sealed and disposed as hazardous waste.
- Sharps waste may be disposed through a medical waste vendor, through a mail-back program, or through the county household hazardous waste program.
- If you experience an unintentional needlestick, wash the puncture site with soap and water and cover with a clean bandage. Seek medical help if you have been injected with animal blood/fluids or a harmful chemical. Report any unintentional needlesticks to your supervisor.



Used Sharps Container
Photograph Courtesy of Hopland REC

Note: Occupational exposure to human blood or body fluids is regulated under the Bloodborne Pathogen Standard (8CCR5193). See Safety Note #1 for further information. Occupational exposure to animal pathogens is regulated under the Zoonotic Disease Standard (8CCR5199.1)