



Sharps Handling and Disposal

We use the term "Sharps" to describe those items that have corners, edges or projections that can cut or puncture human skin. Common examples of sharps include hypodermic needles, razor blades, scalpel blades, scissors, knives and broken glass. If not handled carefully, laboratory items such as Pasteur pipettes, capillary tubing, microscope slides and cover slips can also cause sharps injuries. Many sharps, regardless of what they have been used for, are regulated by the Department of Environmental Protection as infectious waste and must be disposed of properly.

Sharps become many times more dangerous when they have been in contact with a disease-causing bacteria or virus, or if they have blood on them. Human blood can carry Hepatitis, AIDS and many other serious diseases. Used sharps have the potential to penetrate the skin and carry these organisms into the body, where infection can then occur.

To guard against sharps injuries, please keep the following things in mind:

- Never dispose of sharps in the regular trash. Sharps should be put into a rigid, leak proof sealable container for disposal. Sharps containers are available from most suppliers of scientific goods (VWR, Fisher, Thomas Scientific), and from the BMB and Chemistry Stock Rooms. Do not overfill sharps containers; the lid must close.
- To avoid injuring yourself or others, keep the sharps container as close to where you are working as possible.
- Never recap needles prior to disposal. If you are conducting a procedure that requires a needle to be reused, use the one-handed method (contact EHS for more information).
- Handle sharps as little as possible. If cleaning up sharps such as broken glass, do not use your hands. Use a broom and dustpan or forceps to pick the material up.
- Contact EHS to dispose of your full sharps container(s).

Faculty and staff who must take medication by injection can receive a sharps container free of charge by contacting EHS. We will pick up the full container from your office and provide a new container as needed. At University Park, students who get their medications from University Health Services may also pick up a sharps container at the Ritenour Pharmacy.

For additional information about these programs, please contact EHS at (814) 865-6391.