

# SHARPS

## **1.0 What Are Sharps?**

- Needles and syringes
- Broken glass
- Any other object that can pierce or penetrate the skin easily

## **2.0 What Are The Problems With Sharps?**

Sharps can cause skin penetrating injuries which can expose workers to blood-borne diseases such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The risk of getting a blood-borne disease only occurs if the sharp has been contaminated with blood from an infected person.

Skin penetrating injuries can also expose workers to other infection risks such as tetanus. Workers who suffer a skin penetrating injury can become quite anxious or upset after the event, due to the uncertainty about it

## **3.0 What Are The Solutions?**

- Develop a sharps register to record the location, frequency and number of discarded sharps..
- Consider design features that discourage inappropriate sharps use and disposal and which increase the visibility of discarded sharps (e.g. good lighting; provision of sharps containers in areas where sharps are commonly found).
- Develop safe work procedures to prevent skin penetrating injuries from sharps and train workers in these. For example, instruct workers not to manually compress garbage bags or place their hands into areas where they can't see what's in the area (e.g. in garbage bags, behind toilet cisterns).
- Develop safe work procedures for the safe handling and disposal of sharps. Do NOT attempt to recap needles.
- Provide a sharps disposal kit and train workers in its use. This should contain disposable gloves, appropriate tongs to pick up the sharp, and an appropriate (rigid walled, puncture resistant) sharps container.
- Train workers about the risks associated with skin penetrating injuries, how to protect against injury and what to do if accidentally injured.
- Develop procedures to manage skin penetrating injuries. If a person gets a skin penetrating injury:
  - Encourage the wound to bleed by gently squeezing
  - Wash the area with cold running water and soap if available
  - Apply an antiseptic if available and cover the wound with a bandaid/dressing

- Have the person see a doctor or go to the hospital as soon as possible
- Talk to the worker about accessing counselling services
- Implement a hepatitis B vaccination program for workers who have regular contact with sharps that may be contaminated with blood