



Management of Sharps

Inappropriate handling of sharps, both during and after treatment, is the major cause of injuries involving potential exposure to blood-borne diseases in the dental surgery.

It is essential all sharp instruments must be handled and used with care, and the techniques employed to minimise the risk of penetrating injuries to dental staff. Sharp instruments such as scalpels and scalers must never be passed by hand between employees. To avoid sharps injuries places instruments and sharp items when they are being carried from the surgery to the sterilisation room.

Needles must not be re-sheathed unless using an approved recapping device or single-handed technique. Contaminated needles must never be bent or broken by hand or removed from disposable syringes. Dental practitioners are responsible for their used needles and must develop an appropriate management system to render them safe to ensure staff members are not injured during patient changeover.

Disposal of single-use sharps

The clinician using a disposable sharp item must be responsible for its immediate safe management or disposal after use. This must be at the point of use (i.e. the operatory or treatment room) unless transferred in an appropriate container.

Used disposable needle syringe combinations, empty or partially used cartridges of local anaesthetic solution, burs, needles, scalpel blades, orthodontic bands, endodontic files and other single-use sharp items must be discarded in an approved clearly labeled container.

A separate sharps container is located in each treatment room. Disposable sharps should be placed directly into the sharps container, while reusable sharps such as burs are placed into a stand. Dental assistants should check that sharps such as burs and orthodontic wires have been removed by the operator before commencing the changeover procedure.

Disposable sharps, if not placed by the operator into a sharps bin located at the chair side, could alternatively be placed after use in a specific puncture-proof dish to minimise risk.

Please follow the ADG needle stick injury policy in the event of an exposure incident.

Further information on the safe handling of sharps can be found in the *ADA's Practical Guide to Infection Control (2015)*.