Procedure

Safe Handling and Disposal of Needles and Syringes

Responsible Officer: Professional Officer (OHS)

Approval Date: February 2012

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Associated Documents: Administering Medicines in Schools

Superseded Document: None
1. Purpose
School staff may be required to handle and dispose of a needle/syringe used by a student for the management of a medical condition or one found on school property. It is also important to know that incorrect handling and unsafe disposal of needles and syringes present a potential hazard. While the risk of acquiring a disease from a needlestick injury in a community setting is very low, it is important they are disposed of promptly and safely. Should a needlestick injury occur in the use or disposal of a needle/syringe, these procedures outline the required action to be taken.

2. Scope
This document applies to all schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

3. Definitions
3.1. Sharps:
Objects that are intended for penetrating the skin. They include needles, syringes with a needle and epi-pens.

3.2. Sharps Container:
A rigid-walled, puncture-proof and sealable receptacle for the collection of sharps. To minimise the risk of the sharp puncturing the container it is recommended the container complies with AS standard 4261:1994 or 4031:1992.

3.3. Needle stick injury:
Skin penetration injury resulting from a used needle or syringe.

4. Procedure
4.1 Safe use of Needles and Sharps.
   a. All staff must be trained in the use of epi-pens by appropriately qualified personal.
   b. Individual health care plans, particularly dealing with the management of diabetes, may require staff to either give or supervise injections. Where schools do agree to a request for staff to give injections or check blood sugar levels, appropriate training from medical personal is required. Such training is to form part of the individual health care plan and be completed prior to the commencement of any medical assistance by the staff member.
   c. Principal must make available latex or vinyl gloves and a sharps container.

4.2 Disposal of Needles and Syringes.
All needles and syringes, including epi-pens, must be disposed of in a sharps container that complies with the appropriate standard. Such containers may be non-reusable personal use containers provided by students or the school may purchase containers from commercial suppliers. Some waste contractors provide (for a fee) a pick-up and disposal service along with a replacement sharps container.

Individual needles and sharps must never be disposed of in general waste.

4.3 Safe disposal of sharps found in the playground.
   a. Students should never handle sharps.
   b. Before staff handle sharps - move away any people (especially children) who are nearby.
   c. Ensure there is space to move and to clearly observe the sharps and your hands.
d. Bring the school sharps container to the found sharp. Never carry the sharp across the ground to the container located elsewhere. Do not hold the container or ask another person to hold it but place it on the ground.

e. Put on disposable latex or vinyl gloves.

f. Do not handle more than one item at a time. If there are multiple sharps, carefully separate them using a stick or implement – do not try to flick them or pick them up with a grabber/implement. The use of such implements increases the risk of injury through uncontrolled flicking of the sharp.

g. Pick up the syringe by the middle of the barrel.

h. Place the syringe in the container sharp end first.

i. Place the lid securely on the sharps container and return to original location.

j. Remove gloves carefully and dispose of. Wash your hands with running water and soap.

4.4 Managing Needlestick Injury.

Immediate management of needle-stick injuries will minimise the risk of the staff member contracting an infectious disease or experiencing excessive emotional trauma. The following steps must be used:

   a. Stay calm and reassure the person.

   b. Wash the area well with soap and running water (alcohol based hand rubs can be used when soap and water are not available).

   c. Pat-dry the area around a skin penetration injury and apply a sterile adhesive dressing.

   d. Ensure the needle/syringe is safely collected using established procedures.

   e. Report the injury immediately to your supervisor. The affected person must receive medical advice from a registered health professional as soon as possible. Advice and appropriate risk exposure treatment/counselling may be obtained through an Emergency department of a local hospital or the employee’s own doctor.

   f. Complete the workplace injury form.