Proper Handling and Disposal of Sharps and Bio-Hazardous Waste

What are ‘sharps’?

‘Sharps’ are a particularly dangerous kind of medical waste, or bio-hazardous waste. Medical waste is bandages, materials and equipment that may have come into contact with blood or body fluids and pose a personal hazard when handled. ‘Sharps’ are types of medical equipment including syringes, needles, lancets, scalpels, razor blades, glass test tubes, microscope slides, and any other article capable of puncturing human skin.

How to handle sharps:

Gather the following equipment and leave in an easily accessible area

1) Thick, white laundry detergent bottle: heavy plastic detergent bottle, one per group, with a handle and a screw top lid
2) Tongs: metal or plastic tongs, one per group, of cleanable construction preferred
3) Latex gloves: two pair minimum per group, with extras on hand
4) Hard-soled shoe: steel toe and shank preferred
5) A red permanent marker
6) Roll of duct tape
7) Alcohol wipe: wipes and/or foaming alcohol (1.9 bleach to water solution made fresh can be used)
8) Paper towels

Removal Procedures:

1) Never handle sharps with bare or gloved hands. Put on both pairs gloves.
2) Do not hold the container near body while placing a sharp into the container. Set container on the ground next to the sharp and use the tongs to place sharp into the container. Watch out for your feet as well!
3) When the materials are cleaned up or the container is two-thirds full:
   a) Screw the lid on tightly,
   b) Place a large piece of duct tape over the lid,
   c) Write “BIOHAZARD! DO NOT RECYCLE” in red permanent ink visibly on the bottle, and
   d) Dispose of the container in a dumpster or covered trash receptacle.
   e) DO NOT RECYCLE THIS CONTAINER!!!
   f) Never carry an open sharps container with you that contains medical waste. Fill it up, package it properly, and then get it away from you!
4) Once the sharps pickup is completed and the container disposed of, remove one pair of the latex gloves. With the other pair of gloves still on your hands, clean and disinfect the tongs any fluid splashes on shoes or elsewhere with the alcohol or bleach solution. Contaminated clothing should be removed and laundered on the “Sanitize” cycle of your washing machine or thrown away. NOTE: Bleach solutions can damage fabrics.
5) Put the equipment away and remove one last pair of gloves. Wipe off hands with alcohol. As soon as possible, wash hands with soap and warm, running water.
Accidental Exposure and Contamination:

1) Avoid skin contact with needles or fluids containing blood.
2) If contacted by the above, wipe off skin and clean with alcohol (do not use bleach on skin)
3) Wash the surface immediately with soap and running water
4) If accidentally pricked by a ‘sharp’:
   a) Assume it is contaminated. Better to be on the side of caution!
   b) Encourage bleeding for a minute or two by squeezing the wound to push out any germs. If
      you prick your finger, hold the impacted hand below your waist to encourage the blood to
      run down your arm and squeeze some blood out- similar to how diabetics test their blood
      sugar.
   c) Do not suck on wound!!!
   d) Wash the area with soap and warm water!
   e) Save the needle in safe container for testing at the hospital.
   f) Seek immediate advice from your doctor or hospital.
5) YOU MUST contact your physician within one hour regarding disease exposure risks and appropriate
   post-exposure vaccines.

Minimize bacterial and viral exposure:

1) Avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth with dirty hands. Do not eat, drink, or smoke until hands can be
   washed with soap and running water.
2) Wear protective gloves during Cleanup and wash immediately after with soap.
3) Individuals with open wounds should not expose them to stream water.

Suggestions taken from the Prince George’s County Health Department & Chrysalis
Environmental Services