

THE SKINNY ON SHARPES

Sharps include needles, scalpels, lancets, razor blades, scissors, metal wire, retractors, clamps, pins, staples, cutters and glass items. Essentially, any object that is able to cut the skin can be considered a sharp.

These injuries transmit infectious diseases, especially blood-borne viruses:

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which leads to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C

Accidental punctures by contaminated needles can inject hazardous fluids into the body. Even small amounts of infectious fluid can spread certain diseases.

Sharps can create a cut in the skin which allows mucosal contact with blood or fluids.

The risk of infection after exposure to infected blood varies by blood-borne pathogen.

Preventing injuries is the most effective way to protect workers. A comprehensive sharps injury prevention program would include:

- Recommended guidelines.
- Improved equipment design.
- Effective disposal systems.
- Employee training.
- Safe recapping procedures, where necessary.
- Surveillance programs.