

## Guidelines for Handling and Storing Medical Waste

Many types of facilities can generate medical waste: hospitals, clinics, physicians offices, dental practices, laboratories, blood banks, veterinary hospitals/clinic, and medical research facilities. Medical Waste may be either non-infectious or infectious.

### Non-Infectious Waste

Non-Infectious waste is waste at a hospital or health care facility that has not been contaminated with blood or other human body fluids. This includes commonly occurring waste such as IV bags, tubing, non-bloody gloves, packaging and urine-soaked pads.

#### Disposal of Non- Infectious Waste

Non-infectious waste does not need to be disinfected and can be discarded in the regular trash can with other solid waste. Staff who may come in contact with both infectious and non-infectious waste should receive training on an annual basis to ensure that they are able to successfully identify both.

### Infectious Waste (Medical Waste)

This is waste that may be contaminated by blood, body fluid or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM). Medical Waste is divided into two categories: biohazardous+or %sharps+.

#### How do you know if an item is contaminated?

If the item is soaked with blood, body fluid or OPIM (dripping with blood/body fluid when squeezed)

### UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

The Bloodborne Pathogen Standard states that universal precautions should be taken when people are exposed to blood/body fluids. Implementing Universal precautions is an approach to infection control where all human blood/body fluids are treated as infectious. In other words treat all blood/body fluid as if infected whether you think it is or not.

#### How are workers exposed to Medical Waste?

- Needle sticks or cuts from used needles or sharps 
- Blood or OPIM coming in contact with your eyes, nose, mouth or broken skin
- Splashes or punctures

#### How can you protect yourself?

- Get the hepatitis B vaccine
- Read and understand your employer's Exposure Control Plan.
- Use Best Management Practices (BMP) whenever practical. Common BMP include:
  - Hand washing is one of the most important practices and easiest ways to prevent exposure. 
  - Dispose of used sharps promptly into an appropriate sharps disposal container.
  - Use personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves and face shields, every time there is a potential for exposure to blood or body fluids.
  - Clean work surfaces with germicidal products.

### STORAGE & HANDLING

Storage Containers should be:

- Closable
- Equipped with a tightfitting cover
- Puncture resistant
- Leak proof on sides and bottom
- In good condition, cleaned and decontaminated on a regular schedule



### **Biohazardous Waste**

Place all biohazardous waste in a red biohazardous waste bag. The biohazardous waste bag must then be put in a rigid container for storage until it is picked up for proper disposal.

### **Sharps Waste**

Place all sharps in a sharps container. Sharps containers must be sealed prior to being discarded or replaced.



### **Labels**

**Medical Waste Containers should be labeled with:**

- Water-resistant labels
- The words **%Biohazardous Waste+** for biohazardous waste
- The words **%Sharps Waste+** or the international symbol

## **Bloodborne Pathogens**

*All labels should be affixed to or printed on the outside of the container.*

During use, containers for medical waste shall be:

- Easily accessible to personnel and located as close as is feasible to the immediate area where sharps are used or can be reasonably anticipated to be found (e.g., laundries);
- Maintained upright throughout use; and
- Replaced routinely and not be allowed to overfill.

When moving containers of medical waste from the area of use, the container shall be: Closed immediately prior to removal or replacement to prevent spillage or protrusion of contents during handling, storage, transport, or shipping

### **Medical Waste Accumulation Times**

**All medical waste must be disposed of in timely manner**

Facilities generating more than 20 pounds of biohazardous or sharps waste per month may store the waste onsite at or above 32 degrees Fahrenheit for up to **seven days** without obtaining prior written approval from the enforcement agency.

Facilities generating less than 20 pounds of biohazardous waste per month may store the waste onsite at or above 32 degrees Fahrenheit for up to **thirty days**.

Biohazardous or sharps waste may be stored onsite at or below 32 degrees Fahrenheit for up to **ninety days** without obtaining prior written approval from the enforcement agency.

**The enforcement agency may require more frequent removal if odors from biohazardous or sharps waste poses a nuisance.**

### **What you should do if you're exposed?**

- Wash needle sticks and cuts with soap and water
- Flush splashes to nose, mouth, or skin with water.
- Irrigate eyes with clean water, saline, or sterile wash.
- Report all exposures promptly to ensure that you receive appropriate follow up care

### **How can facilities improve safety and health for workers?**

You can improve safety by participating in the following activities:

- Identify and evaluate hazards and adopt interventions to prevent work-related injuries
- Identify employees with occupational exposure
- Provide training
- Develop Minimum Standards

## **For more information**

### **U. S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration**

[https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data\\_BloodborneFacts/bfact04.pdf](https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_BloodborneFacts/bfact04.pdf)

### **California Department of Public Health**

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/certlic/medicalwaste/Documents/MedicalWaste/2013/MWMAfinal2013.pdf>

### **San Francisco Department of Public Health**

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