

## SHARPS USE AND HANDLING WITH LIVESTOCK

(For assistance, please contact EHS at (402) 472-4925, or visit our web site at <http://ehs.unl.edu/>)

*This SOP describes best practices and recommendations for working with sharps around large animals in a rural and/or farm setting.*

Sharps are items that can easily puncture the skin. Examples include needles, razor blades, and broken glass. All sharps must be handled and disposed of in a manner that protects you and others from exposure and possible injury.

Promptly dispose of all sharps in a rigid sharps container. Accounting for items before **and** after a procedure, and prior to clean up, can help reduce preventable injuries.



Rigid sharps disposal containers are available in a variety of shapes and sizes that can easily be incorporated into daily use. Lightweight plastic beverage containers should **not** be used. Needles and scalpel blades can easily puncture these containers, injuring the handler.

Re-purposed containers used for sharps must satisfy the following requirements:

- Must be labeled as “Sharps.”
- Must be labeled as “Do Not Recycle.”
- Must be rigid, leak and puncture proof, and sealable.



Needlesticks are one of the most common injuries in large animal husbandry, so caution should be exercised to minimize the risk. Recapping needles should be avoided whenever possible as this is a common cause of needlesticks. Directly dispose of the needle into an approved sharps container.

### **Best Practices**

1. **DON'T** set needles down in areas or on surfaces where you or others could subsequently be stuck by the needle.
2. **DO** ensure that animals are restrained, to the best extent possible, before uncapping a needle for use. Many needle stick injuries happen when trying to use a needle on an unrestrained animal.
3. When applicable and feasible, needles should not be recapped to ensure staff safety.
4. When working chute side, spent needles should be removed with pliers and disposed of in an appropriate sharps container. In some instances, the plastic needle cover may be replaced to facilitate removal of the needle from the syringe. The use of puncture-resistant gloves is encouraged (e.g., HexArmor SharpsMaster II® 9014)
5. In a pasture, range or livestock pen setting, it is often not feasible or safe to transport an uncapped needle. Care should be taken when replacing a protective plastic needle cover on a hypodermic needle. Use of the one-handed method or mechanical means such as pliers to facilitate recapping is strongly recommended.
6. **NEVER** recap a needle containing products toxic to humans (i.e., Micotil®)
7. All puncture wounds from an accidental needle stick are considered dangerous, regardless of needle status (clean, sterile or used). If a needle stick should occur, wash area with soap and water, and notify your supervisor of the incident. Supervisors should ensure that the incident is documented with EHS and the UNL Benefits office. See the EHS SOP, *On-the-Job & Student Injuries*, for more information.
8. Do not dispose of needles and scalpels with everyday trash. Sharps should be placed in approved sharps containers. If using disposable syringes, do not remove the needle from the syringe prior to disposal; place the entire syringe with attached needle into the sharps container. If you are using a glass syringe or an auto-injector and must remove the needle, use mechanical means such as pliers. Do not remove the needle with your fingers. Fill the sharps containers only 2/3 full to prevent potential injuries when disposing of sharps.
9. If using containers other than approved sharps containers (e.g., laundry detergent bottles), render sharps non-infectious by covering sharps in a disinfectant solution before encasing. Fill containers no more than half-full of sharps, then add sufficient encasement compound such as concrete or cement to entrap all the sharps. By filling containers only half full, there's room to do mixing within the same container. Seal the container.

**Reminders:**

Use the appropriate needle size/gauge for the situation. Use the smallest needle possible to complete the injection, but large enough to prevent the needle from breaking off in the muscle. Primary considerations in needle selection include route of administration, size of animal, and location or site. Secondary consideration in needle selection includes viscosity of the fluid (how thick and tenacious the fluid is) and volume/amount of fluid injected.

**When to Change Needles**

- Immediately if the needle bends (**DO NOT USE BENT NEEDLES**).
- If needles become contaminated with feces, dirt, or irritating chemicals.
- If the needle point is damaged or burrs develop.
- Before the needle becomes dull (every 10 to 15 animals).
- Between livestock with known blood borne infectious disease.
- Based on your veterinarian's instructions.