

ALBERTA  
**FARM SAFETY**  
PROGRAM

# Sharps Injury Prevention

## A Guide for the Safe Handling of Agricultural Sharps

Growing Forward 2 

A federal-provincial-territorial initiative

*Alberta*  Government

Canada 





# Sharps Injury Prevention

## A Guide for the Safe Handling of Agricultural Sharps

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# What Are Sharps?



*This safety guide is a reference for new and young farm workers who handle sharps and animal medicine. It's a good refresher for veteran farm workers as well...*

**“SHARPS” IS THE UNIVERSAL TERM USED FOR ITEMS LIKE NEEDLES, SCALPELS, SCISSORS, PINS, STAPLES, OR GLASS ITEMS. ESSENTIALLY, ANY OBJECT THAT IS ABLE TO CUT THE SKIN CAN BE CONSIDERED A “SHARP”.**

While getting poked by one of these sharps initially may not seem like a big deal, the thought of being exposed to a contaminated object with the potential to cause infection should get your attention.

Bodily fluids from the animals being treated and drugs from animal vaccines or treatments are often involved when using livestock medical tools. A cut or poke caused by mishandled sharps can create an entry point for dangerous pathogens like bacteria or viruses. If left untreated, this can develop into an infection.

For this reason, sharps demand your full attention and respect.

Whether reaching into a toolkit and getting accidentally stabbed, or picking up a garbage bag and getting poked through the plastic by an exposed needle, improper storage or disposal of sharps can be hazardous to workers and family members. When using sharps while tending to livestock, take proper measures to avoid incidents from happening.

The suggested best practices for handling sharps outlined throughout this guide will increase efficiency and improve your worksite and personal safety. These practices can save time... like the time it takes to recover from an injury, poisoning, or hospital stay!



*Handling agricultural sharps can be a dangerous job. Take it seriously.*

# Sharp Management Practices

Most livestock production operations do a fair amount of self-administered routine veterinary care such as performing vaccinations, or treatments for common diseases or sicknesses. This results in an increased risk for needlestick or sharps injuries. Good sharps worker and management practices can help control the hazards of being stuck by a sharp.

## WORKER PRACTICES:

- Slow down – don't rush with injections
- Restrain animals properly
- Get help from coworkers or family members
- Use the correct equipment and techniques
- Don't put needle caps in your mouth
- Discard bent or dull needles – don't use or try to straighten
- Don't carry needles/syringes in your pockets
- Use appropriate sharps container for disposal – never discard sharps carelessly
- Don't recap needles if not needed
- Make sure to report all needlestick injuries

## FARM MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:

- Train workers/family members about:
  - Safe needle handling
  - Safe injection procedures
  - Types of drugs used
- Routinely re-train workers to reinforce safety procedures
- Provide safe animal handling equipment; ensure proper support
- Provide readily accessible sharps container for safe needle disposal
- Provide needle/syringes with protective devices, such as retractable needles or hinged syringe caps
- Remind workers to use caution when using products of concern
- Pregnant workers should not inject hormones
- Encourage workers not to rush
- Encourage workers to report injuries

# To Recap or Not Recap...



*What to do if you get poked:*

- *Immediately wash the area with soap and water*
- *Report the injury to farm manager or family members*
- *Contact a health care provider*

Recapping a needle is said to be the number one cause of unintentional exposure when it comes to handling a sharp. Once you have used a needle and you are done with it, place it directly into a sharps container. The only time you should recap a needle is if you're not going to use it right away and you need to transport it to another location.

## IF YOU MUST RECAP, FOLLOW THESE STEPS FOR A SAFE WAY TO DO SO:

- Place the cap on a flat surface (a counter, the tailgate of a truck or any safe, sturdy area).
- Using only one hand, hold the syringe in the tips of your fingers with the needle pointing away from you. *See image 1.*
- Slowly slide the syringe along the flat surface, towards the cap. *See image 2.*
- Once the needle is well inside the cap, secure the cap by applying pressure from your other hand. *See image 3.*
- Ta-da! Mission accomplished, with little chance of you getting poked.

To transport your syringes safely, you need a rigid container (like a toolbox or a hard-sided pencil case). This will ensure no one is injured by accidentally sitting on a misplaced needle.

1



*Using only one hand, hold the syringe with the needle pointing away from you, ensuring the needle doesn't contact the surface.*

2



*Slowly slide the syringe until the needle is inside the cap.*

3



*Secure the cap by applying pressure with your other hand.*



*A simple toolbox clearly marked as medical storage will work to contain sharps and syringes.*

# Checking the Active Ingredient

Every drug or vaccine has an active ingredient, which will be listed on the product's label or package insert. In case of unintentional exposure, know the active ingredient and let your physician or the Poison and Drug Information Service know (see listing below). Knowing what it is before you administer the vaccine will save you time and expedite the treatment process.



*Handy Tip: Keep a binder of product labels from the vaccines and drugs used frequently on your farm. Put the binder in an easily accessible spot like your vaccination tool kit, or next to the fridge or cupboard where you store your medicines.*



*Make sure you read the product label or package insert before you start using the product.*

## POISON & DRUG INFORMATION SERVICE

Alberta & Northwest Territories

1-800-332-1414

Saskatchewan

1-866-454-1212

FREE • CONFIDENTIAL • 24/7 • EXPERTISE & ADVICE • POISONS  
CHEMICALS • MEDICATIONS • HERBALS



# Sharps Disposal

Just as important as properly handling a sharp is knowing how to properly dispose of one.

1. Do not toss sharps into a regular garbage can — needles will easily poke through the sides of a garbage bag.
2. Be sure to separate your sharps materials from other waste as soon as you're done using it. Do not leave sharps lying on a counter, shelf, or tossed into the bottom of a bucket. Many veterinarian offices stock sharps containers; call ahead to ask. You can also check with the sales reps at your local farm supply store to see if they carry them.
3. Do not burn sharps disposal containers.
4. Labelled, sealed sharps containers can be take to Class II landfills that accept medical waste. Contact your local municipal office to ask for the location of the closest Class II landfill. Keep in mind each region will have different disposal regulations, so calling for clarification is important.
5. Making your own sharps container is also an option — check out the side bar for instructions. The Alberta Farm Safety Program has safety decals free of charge to help get you started.

## HOW TO MAKE A SHARPS CONTAINER:

Choose a container that is made from heavy plastic, such as a bleach bottle, liquid laundry soap container or a five-gallon bucket with a sealed lid and a narrow mouth or opening. A heavy plastic container is essential to avoid punctures from needles. A milk jug will not do because needles can easily puncture through the thin plastic.

### Things to consider when making your own container:

- Select a puncture-proof container made of thick, sturdy plastic.
- Ensure the container has a fitted, sealed lid.
- The top of the container should be narrow enough to drop the sharps into, but not wide enough for a hand to fit. Never reach into a sharps disposal container for any reason!
- Clearly label the container as one that contains sharps. Decals are available through the Alberta Farm Safety Program, or you could make your own.
- Never put your sharps container in the recycling bin.
- Keep the lid with the container in order to re-seal when not in use and for final disposal.



*These empty detergent jugs work fine for a used sharps container.*



*Here is an appropriate label for a home made sharps container, and it's available free of charge from the Alberta Farm Safety Program. Visit the website listed at the end of this manual.*

# Charting Exposures

Despite your best efforts, sometimes you'll be working with sharps in less-than-ideal conditions. In these cases, preparation will be key. The table below shows what to watch out for and how to prevent various risks of exposure.



Use latex or nitrile gloves to protect your skin from coming in contact with medical chemicals.



Keep the work area tidy to lessen the chance of unintentional exposure to medications.



Always check label warnings in any case of exposure to used agricultural sharps.

## ROUTES OF EXPOSURE, PRECAUTIONS AND REMEDIES

	How it Might Happen	How to React to It	How to Prevent It
Skin Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some medications are absorbed through the skin or transferred to the mouth, eyes or nose by hands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove contaminated clothing</li> <li>Immediately wash the affected areas with soap and water</li> <li>Check label warnings for further required action</li> <li>Contact your health care provider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wear latex or nitrile gloves and protective clothing</li> </ul>
Eye Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Via splash or aerosol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wash eyes under running water</li> <li>Check label warnings for required action</li> <li>Contact your health care provider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wear safety glasses or face shield</li> </ul>
Self Injection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can result in adverse reaction including infections and even death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wash the affected areas with soap and water</li> <li>Disinfect the injection site</li> <li>Check label warnings for required action</li> <li>Contact your health care provider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Never place your hand or fingers in the path of a needle</li> <li>Keep the needle shielded</li> <li>Use safe injection techniques</li> <li>Take care when reinstalling a shield on a needle</li> </ul>
Inhalation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dust or aerosol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check label warnings for required action</li> <li>Contact your health care provider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wear a respirator</li> </ul>
Ingestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Splash, hand to mouth transfer through eating, drinking or smoking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check label warnings for required action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling medications</li> <li>Always wash hands with soap and water after handling medications</li> </ul>

Source: Cattle Medicine - Responsible Use Course, Module 11-8

# Storage

Just like keeping a tidy shop, house, or vehicle is important for safety reasons, keeping your agricultural sharps and medicine storage space clean is important for those very same reasons.

Having a clearly designated, marked and organized space will mean increased efficiency and safety when you are looking for a certain drug or vaccine. When tidy, all drugs, vaccines and tools that have the potential to hurt or harm someone are in one safe place.

In the long run, your organization efforts will increase efficiency. It's well worth the effort!



*Don't let your storage areas get messy and dangerous...*



*Clearly label all storage space...*



*...and tidy up.*



*The Alberta Farm Safety Program has labels available free of charge to help clearly mark your storage space.*

# A Particularly Sharp Predicament

## TOP FOUR REASONS WHY UNINTENTIONAL EXPOSURE IS SERIOUS

1. Getting stabbed by a needle will hurt you. You run the risk of infection from being poked by a contaminated sharp.
2. There can be many different kinds of bacteria on a needle or sharp. You may not know what long-term effects could come from accidental exposure.
3. Livestock vaccines, pesticides and other drugs are designed for an animal with a different body composition than a human.
4. Reactions to unintentional exposure can be severe. Reported outcomes include trouble breathing, loss of feeling or movement in the affected area, nerve damage and loss of pregnancy.

### CONTACT US

#### Alberta Farm Safety Program

[www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety](http://www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety)

[farm.safety@gov.ab.ca](mailto:farm.safety@gov.ab.ca)







