

# Safe and Proper Sharps Disposal During the COVID-19 Mass Vaccination Campaign



**Sharps** are objects that can pierce the skin (for example, contaminated syringes and needles, lancets, scalpels, infusion needle sets, connection needles, auto injectors), as defined in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Bloodborne Pathogens standard. This fact sheet reinforces how you can protect yourself from needlestick injuries while administering COVID-19 vaccines or while helping at vaccination sites.

## Protect Yourself From a Needlestick Injury

- Place sharps disposal containers as close as possible to you or within arm's reach. When a wall mount is not possible, set the container on a table or a cart in an upright position (preferably secured). Do not place sharps disposal containers on the floor or the ground.
- Immediately after you use a sharp, engage any safety feature, and place it in a sharps disposal container that is closable, puncture-resistant, leakproof on the sides and bottom, and biohazard-labeled or color-coded.
- Do not remove, recap, break, or bend contaminated needles or separate contaminated needles from syringes before discarding them into a sharps disposal container as this increases the risk of a needlestick injury and a bloodborne pathogen exposure. Best practice is to immediately place the connected needle and syringe into the sharps disposal container.
- Use sharps containers to dispose of needles and other sharps contaminated with blood or other potentially infectious material.
- Close the container when it is filled to the clearly marked fill line or when it is  $\frac{3}{4}$  full if it has no fill line.
- Do not overfill sharps disposal containers—even during supply shortages—as this increases the risk of a needlestick injury and a bloodborne pathogen exposure.

## Sharps Disposal Containers are for Needles and Sharps Only

- Place only needles and sharps in sharps disposal containers.
- Do not put anything in sharps disposal containers that can be placed in regular waste containers (such as uncontaminated trash, gauze, alcohol pads, needle caps, and gloves).
- Place non-sharp, contaminated material, such as gauze contaminated with blood or other potentially infectious material, in a red biohazard waste disposal bag.
- Follow your local guidelines for proper disposal methods. Visit <https://safeneedledisposal.org>

**If you experience a needlestick from a used or contaminated needle, seek immediate evaluation and treatment.**

**Call the PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) hotline at 1-888-448-4911 immediately for guidance on treating exposures.**

## Learn More about Sharps Disposal

SafeNeedleDisposal.org  
<https://safeneedledisposal.org>

Food and Drug Administration (FDA):  
How to get rid of a sharps container  
<https://www.fda.gov/files/medical%20devices/published/How-to-Get-Rid-of-a-Sharps-Container--Printable-Version.pdf>

OSHA: Bloodborne pathogens and needlestick prevention  
<https://www.osha.gov/bloodborne-pathogens>

OSHA: Bloodborne Pathogens standard  
<https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.1030>

OSHA: Protecting yourself when handling contaminated sharps  
<https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data/BloodborneFacts/bbfact02.html>

OSHA: Poster for COVID-19 vaccination sites  
<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4109.pdf>

CDC: Emergency sharps information (what to do in case of a needlestick)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/bbp/emergnedl.html>

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH): Preventing needlestick injuries at COVID-19 vaccination sites  
<https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2021/03/02/needlestick-prevention/>

[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus)

