



The Gatehouse- Managing Sharps Procedure 2024

Introduction

The Gatehouse is a community drop-in centre offering free support services for adults who are; homeless, vulnerably housed, on low income and/or looking for company & community. The Gatehouse offers a free community centre with a cafe (six evenings a week), therapeutic and practical workshops, a shower and clothing service, a counselling service, one-to-one casework support and facilitates the Lived Experience Advisory Forum in partnership with Aspire and Oxfordshire Homeless Movement. For more information please see <https://oxfordgatehouse.org/>

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that all the Gatehouse staff and volunteers are aware of the basic safety procedures when handling sharps at the project, in order to minimise risks.

The project aims to work without judgement of the Guests and their current circumstances. This means people are not excluded from the café setting if they are under the influence of alcohol or/and illegal or legal drugs. However, no usage of any substance is allowed in the building or in the garden area.

Background

The Gatehouse recognises its duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all employees. A duty to safeguard those not in their employment but affected by their undertaking. This includes members of the public, contractors, visitors and volunteers.

Employees have a duty to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and others affected by their acts or omissions and to co-operate with the employer and others to enable them to fulfil their legal obligations.

What is a sharps injury?

A sharps injury is an incident, which causes a needle, blade (such as scalpel) or other medical instruments to penetrate the skin. The Gatehouse should take the view that all needles found could be potentially infected, therefore the risk will need to be managed.

What the Gatehouse will do

The Gatehouse must ensure that employees and line management understand the risks through proper:

- Information/instruction.
- Training and supervision.
- Only Project Workers should handle sharps and no volunteers.

The Gatehouse must understand:

- The risks involved.
- What to do if needles are found.
- The reporting procedures.

The Gatehouse must provide appropriate equipment for handling and disposal of sharps for example:

- Tools for picking up needles e.g. pincer tools/tongs/litter picker/tweezers/dustpan and hand brush.
- Sharps boxes (capable of safely containing needles).
- Gloves.

The Gatehouse shall provide suitable gloves and they should always be used when using tools to move needles. Gloves should be selected to give a high degree of puncture resistance. Remember that gloves should not be relied upon to give adequate protection on their own, but used as secondary protection in the case of accidental contact/puncture wounds.

Arms are vulnerable when throwing bags into bins and needles in black bags (being carried) banging against legs can cause injuries.

The Gatehouse shall provide adequate first-aid equipment, including clean water and/or sterile wipes for cleaning wounds, and supply of sterile, waterproof, adhesive dressings.

Staff can be exposed to needles in the material they handle during the course of their work. Needles can be found in:

- Black bags/sacks of rubbish (sometimes needles are pushed through tied knots in black bags).
- Bedding, clothing and soft furnishing.
- Toilet and shower area.
- The garden area including in discarded litter/litter bins (inside cigarette packets, sweet packaging, drinks cans).

Risks include:

- Blood-borne diseases (e.g. hepatitis and HIV/AIDS).
- Direct exposure can happen through accidental contamination from discarded needles.

The actual risk of infection depends on:

- If the needle user was infected with hepatitis or HIV viruses.
- How much infected material enters the bloodstream – a needle attached to a syringe containing blood is likely to be a higher risk than a detached needle.
- How infected the material is
 - There may also be a risk of tetanus.

A safe system of work and set of instructions has been created to act as a control measure when dealing with 'sharps' i.e. needles/syringes and bladed devices such as scalpels and razors.

The Gatehouse will:

- Provide sharps boxes/bins for the safe disposal of needles or vials.
- Operate clear handling procedures for the disposal of drug-related waste.
- Ensure that training and information is provided for Project Workers in the safe disposal of sharps or drug related waste.

A safe system of working

In the line of work that Gatehouse Project Workers carry out they should remember that they may find dangerous items and should be alert to the hazards that they present.

Project Workers should be alert for obvious needles before handling waste, bedding, clothing and soft furnishings.

If a dangerous item is found or you suspect their presence in your work area, make sure that the area where you found the item is left as safe as possible and contact your Line Manager.

If you find a needle:

- Do not hide it.
- Do not separate the needle from the syringe.
- Do not put the cap back on the needle.
- Do not play with the needle or syringe.
- Do not put it in a dustbin, down the drain, down the WC or in a litter bin.
- Do not ignore it- deal with it or ask someone to help.

A project worker will then collect one of the provided sharps boxes (stored in the office) equip themselves with suitable gloves, a dustpan and brush and/or a pincer tool. They will then proceed to the area where the suspected dangerous item has been found.

All Project Workers when dealing with the disposal of a suspected dangerous item will have been trained and will follow the written set of instructions that ensure they will remain safe during the procedure.

How to remain safe during the procedure

1. Always wear suitable gloves – (these are in the office near to the sharps bin) even when using tools to move needles. Gloves should not be relied on to give total protection, but they can help resist punctures in case of accidental contact.
2. Sweep up needles with a dust pan and brush or use a pincer tool (pincer tool in the office near the sharps bin).
3. Do not try to re-sheath needles.
4. Place needles in a sharps box – take the sharps box to the needle, not the needle to the sharps box. Try to put the sharps box on an even surface before opening it to deposit the needle.
5. Do not overfill sharps boxes or try to push the contents down.
6. Inform your line managers of any needles found as soon as possible.

Action following a puncture wound from a needle

- Encourage the wound to bleed, do not suck the wound – rinse thoroughly under running water. If water is not available, cleansing wipes provided in first aid kits should be used.
- Cover the wound with a dry plaster/dressing.
- Formally record the incident including details of the action taken in the first aid book and inform your line manager as soon as possible.
- Seek medical advice and treatment immediately – contact the nearest Accident and Emergency Department.

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