

Teaching children/students about needle safety

When needles/syringes are found on school grounds or other public spaces, it is important that they are disposed of promptly and safely to ensure staff, students and others are not put at risk. While needle stick injuries can be stressful, it is important to remember that the risk of contracting a blood borne illness such as HIV, Hepatitis C or Hepatitis B from a needle stick injury in the community is very low.

What can schools do?

It is important to educate students regarding how to identify needles/syringes and what action they should take if they find these items. Students of all ages should be taught to never touch these items and to immediately inform an adult/staff member. The following handout can be used to teach younger students about what to do if they find a needle:

FOR STUDENTS: What to do if you see a needle...



DO NOT TOUCH: This is a needle. If you see a needle on the ground at school, in the park or anywhere else do not touch it. Needles can be sharp and may hurt you – they also can carry germs.



TELL AN ADULT: Tell a teacher or another adult about the needle. If there is another student with you ask them to make sure no one touches the needle while you go get an adult.

Sources:

See a Needle, Lauri Watkins <https://www.seeaneedle.com/about>

Safe Needle Disposal, Interior Health <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/HarmReduction/Pages/Safe-Needle-Disposal.aspx>

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February 2018

FOR ADULTS: What to do if you see a needle

If you or a child/student finds a needle:

Don't panic. While it may be concerning, keep in mind that when properly handled the risk of getting poked, scratched or cut by a needle is very low and the risk of getting an infection from an improperly discarded needle in a community setting is also very low.

Step 1:

- Find a rigid plastic container (e.g. shampoo or liquid laundry bottle) or sharps container
- Place the bottle or sharps container on the ground near item to be disposed of
- Do not recap the syringe or break off the needle

Step 2:

- Use gloves with tongs or pliers to firmly grasp the plunger end (the non-sharp end).
- Use one hand and keep it in sight.
- Always point the sharp end of the needle down and away from you.

Step 3:

- Do not hold the bottle or sharps container in your hand, instead place it on the ground or a hard surface
- Put the needle in sharp-end first and tightly seal.

Step 4:

- Wash hands with soap and water afterwards.

Step 5:

- Dispose of container by bringing it to your local public health unit, harm reduction service or putting it in a community sharps drop box - some local pharmacies may also accept sharps for disposal.

What to do if you or a child/student has been poked, scratched, or cut by a needle?

- Do not panic. A child/student will base their reaction on how you react. If you are calm they are more likely to stay calm too. Always remember, the risk of infection is very low.
- Wash the affected area immediately with soap and warm water, do not squeeze.
- Go to your nearest emergency room for immediate medical attention.

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Talking to kids about the WHY

It is important to teach children what to do if they find improperly discarded needles. Because children are curious, you should expect that they will have questions that may be difficult to answer.

Adults may not be comfortable talking to children about things like drug use and addiction - and depending on the age of the child, they may not be at a stage where they are able to understand these complicated subjects.

Below are some suggested responses to help you navigate the WHY questions:

Why are there needles in the school yard/park/other public place?

For young children– keep it simple: *“Someone was using that to put something inside their body – but it is not safe to leave it out like that because it can hurt someone.”*

For older children – older children may require more information: *“People use needles for a variety of reasons. Some people use needles to put medicine or other drugs inside their bodies. Some medical conditions require people to use needles; others may use needles for medicine to manage pain. People also use needles to inject illegal drugs/ to take a substance that makes them feel different. It’s not safe to leave needles out like that because someone could get hurt”.*

“Some drugs can make people feel very sick when they stop using – and that makes it hard to think about other important things. People who use needles don’t leave them out to hurt other people; they are just trying to survive, the only way they think they can – and that is a terrible way to have to live”.

Some older children may have more WHY questions about substance use.

Why do some people use illegal drugs/become addicted to drugs?

Some people like the way the drugs make them feel and other people don’t. Some people who use drugs will do them now and then but not all the time and some people can’t stop doing them – that is called addiction.

We don’t know for sure why some people struggle with addiction - maybe their brains don’t make the right chemicals in the right amounts, and so, even though it’s not good for their bodies, drugs make them feel better, at least for a short time. Or maybe they had a really difficult life – a lot of pain, or an accident or really bad trauma, or they were hurt or abused by someone in their family, so they never ever felt safe or okay and maybe the drugs helped make them forget about that for a little while.

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It is important to know that illegal drugs can be harmful and that it is not safe to do them. Because they are illegal, you have no idea if you're really getting what you think you are, some drugs can be mixed with even more dangerous things . . . If you are feeling sad, hurt or unsafe it is very important that you talk to an adult that you trust.

Additional resources:

Safe Sharps Disposal Toolkit: A Community Response to a Community Issue

<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/Partners/HarmReduction/Documents/Safe%20Sharps%20Disposal%20Toolkit.pdf>

Talking to teens/youth about drugs

Parents and other supportive adults can play a key part in teaching youth about substance use by talking honestly and openly about the effects of substances and giving answers they'll understand.

Here are some resources to help you talk to youth:

University of Victoria – Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research - Drug Education is Conversation

<https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/hs-pp-conversation.pdf>

University of Victoria – Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research - Drug Education is Health Promotion

<https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/hs-drug-education-as-health-promotion.pdf>

BC Ministry of Health – Overdose Prevention and Response in BC: Talking to Youth

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/overdose/talking-to-youth>

Fraser Health – Stop Overdose: Information for Kit for Schools and Parents

http://www.fraserhealth.ca/media/Overdose_SchoolToolkit_FINAL.pdf

Government of Canada – Talking with Teenagers about Drugs: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-abuse/talking-about-drugs/talking-with-teenagers-about-drugs.html>

Foundry BC: Tips for Reducing the Risk of Harm from Substance Use:

<https://foundrybc.ca/articles/substance-use-tips-reducing-risk-harm/>

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