

# Sharps Disposal for Cleanup Volunteers

## What are Sharps?

Sharps are anything with the capability of puncturing or cutting through the skin. Typical sharps include uncapped needles, syringes with needles attached, knives, razor blades, broken glass, fish hooks, thorns, and jagged metals. Sharps have the potential of being infected with biological, toxic, or radioactive substances that pose health risks when coupled with cuts or puncture wounds.

## What are the Risks?

Sharps pose an immediate danger to river/creek cleanup crews if not managed properly. The biggest hazard in dealing with sharps is the risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens. Bloodborne pathogens are microorganisms that are present in blood and other bodily fluids that can cause diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C.

VOLUNTEERS SHOULD NEVER TOUCH NEEDLES, SYRINGES, OR OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY BE CONTAMINATED WITH BLOOD. LEAVE THEM WHERE YOU FIND THEM, MARK THE LOCATION, AND ALERT NEARBY VOLUNTEERS AND THE EVENT ORGANIZERS.

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF VOLUNTEERS TO ENSURE ACCOMPANYING CHILDREN ARE AWARE OF HOW TO HANDLE SHARPS.

## Personal Protective Equipment

To avoid health risks associated with bloodborne pathogens, it is important that volunteers utilize the personal protective equipment listed below to prevent coming in contact with sharps. The following items will be provided to you prior to beginning the cleanup event in case any sharps are found:

- Disposable and puncture resistant gloves
- Trash picker
- Large plastic bag
- plastic bucket
- Marking flags
- Soap and water
- Towelettes or hand sanitizer
- Broom and dustpan

## How to Handle Sharps

1. Always wear disposable gloves, long clothing that covers exposed skin, and closed-toe shoes during the cleanup event; regardless of the presence of sharps.
2. Always use the trash picker to pick up items whenever possible. When using your hands, use a pair of puncture resistant gloves underneath a pair of disposable gloves.
3. Never reach into an area that cannot be clearly seen into.
4. Never pick up bagged garbage by grasping around the bag, as sharps could puncture the bag and contact you.
5. Bring all the necessary cleanup equipment to the marked sharp location (gloves, trash picker, plastic bucket, broom, dustpan, and marking flags). Never walk with the sharp item to a different location.
6. Pick up broken glass or other noncontaminated sharps using the trash picker or the broom and dustpan and place these items in the designated plastic bucket. Never pick up glass by hand.
7. Never touch contaminated sharps such as needles or syringes; use one of the provided marking flags to mark its location and immediately report its presence to an event organizer and other nearby volunteers. Large uncontaminated sharps that cannot be safely picked up with a trash picker, broom, or tongs should also be marked and reported to an event organizer and nearby volunteers.
8. Use hand sanitizer or towelettes to sanitize your hands whenever changing gloves.
9. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and warm water whenever taking a break or when the cleanup event is over.

### NOTICE

**If at any moment your skin is punctured or cut by a sharp item or you come in contact with any infectious material, immediately wash the exposed area with soap and warm water, report the issue to your supervisor, and seek immediate medical attention. In the event of an emergency, stop what you are doing and call 911.**