



Safe Injection Practices or Needle Safety

What are safe injection practices?

Safe injection practices are important for patients. A safe injection does not harm the patient, recipient, does not expose others to health risks and does not become a dangerous waste for the community. Safe injection practices also prevent transmission of infectious diseases from one patient and another, or between a patient and healthcare providers.

What diseases can be transmitted by incorrect practices?

Incorrect injection practices have resulted in transmission of bloodborne viruses (hepatitis C, hepatitis B, and HIV/AIDS) and some bacterial and fungal infections. These incorrect practices include:

- Using the same device to perform blood sugar testing (blood glucose meters, fingerstick devices) with another person
- Using the same needle to inject medication to more than one person
- Using the same syringe to inject medication to more than one person, even if the needle was changed

Do medication vials have a preservative in them to prevent contamination?

Most multi-dose medication vials have a preservative in them to prevent bacterial growth. The preservative has no effect on viruses. Safe injection practices and germ-free techniques are needed to avoid contaminating medication vials.

What can patients do to practice needle safety?

There are several key rules patients must remember for safe practices with needles and injections.

- Fingerstick devices or blood glucose meters should **never** be used for more than one person.
- **Always** use a new sterile syringe and needle every time.
- Insulin pens and other medication cartridges and syringes made for single-patient-use only should **never** be used for more than one person.

Think “safety first” when you dispose of needles, syringes or sharp devices used.

Always follow these safe practices:

1. Create a “Sharps container” by putting used syringes and needles in a plastic bottle, such as a laundry detergent or bleach bottle; the bottle should be unbreakable and puncture-resistant.
Don't use coffee cans because the plastic lids can come off easily.
Don't use glass bottles as they may break.
Do **NOT** put a plastic container with used syringes out with the recyclable plastics.

2. Close the screw-on top tightly and label your sealed container: "**Contains Sharps.**"
3. Check with your doctor, or public works department, trash collector or local health department about how to dispose of your "Sharps Container" before you put it your household trash. They may have a drop-off site for your container once it is filled.

Another important reason to safeguard needles is to avoid their use by others who may use them to inject street drugs. In addition to placing drug users at risk of overdose or being infected with HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and other serious infections, injecting drugs can lead to sores (abscesses and cellulitis) and heart infections (endocarditis). Key messages for persons who do inject include:

- **Always** use a new sterile syringe and needle every time you inject.
- **Never** share your needles, syringes, cookers, cotton and water.
- **Clean** injection site with soapy water, alcohol swabs, or rubbing alcohol before you inject.
- **Avoid** injecting into the same spot over and over again.
- If you don't have a new syringe and needle and you must inject drugs before you can get clean ones, **clean the syringe and needle with bleach to reduce your risk of infection.**