

# Stay safe: sharps awareness

**By safely disposing of your liquid waste, you are helping to protect the natural environment. But it's important to protect yourself and others too.**

Sharps are needles, blades and other medical instruments that can cause an injury by cutting or pricking the skin.

If you work in the waste industry you are at greater risk of being exposed to sharps injuries – whether that's through handling waste during collection or through sorting activities.

Aside from the physical injury, sharps can carry the risk of infection if there are traces of blood or bodily fluids present. There are more than 20 diseases that can be passed on through fluid transmission, the most serious of which are:

- Hepatitis B Virus (HBV)
- Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

Contact with blood in particular should be treated with caution, as even a small amount of infected fluid can spread disease.

## Preventing exposure

Appropriate safety practices should be followed at all times to prevent the risk of injury.

- Be alert! Look for obvious sharp objects before handling waste
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment including suitable safety gloves
- Never pick up a sharp with your hands as it could be contaminated. If you have to pick it up use protective gloves and a litter picker and place it in a sealed sharp container, otherwise leave it and report it
- If you have to put your hand in a place where you can't see what's in it, wear sharp proof gloves and an arm shield. Only undertake a task like this as a last resort. Gloves should not be relied upon to give adequate protection
- Always wash your hands thoroughly before touching your face or eating food.

## Dealing with a sharp injury

If you cut yourself with a sharp you run the risk of being infected:

- Try and force the wound to bleed gently, ideally under running water
- Wash the wound with soap and water
- Avoid scrubbing or sucking the wound
- Dry the wound and cover it with a plaster or dressing and seek medical advice
- Report the injury to your supervisor or the Scottish Water Accident Helpline 01382 563217.

**Note the risk of infection through sharp injuries depends on a number of factors, including your immune system and the depth of the injury.**

**Although the number of reported sharp incidents each year is high, only a small number of these result in serious illness.**

