

2024

## PRESS RELEASE

**For More Information:**

**ELLEN G. DUYSEN**

**Central States Center for Agricultural Safety  
and Health**

**University of Nebraska Medical Center**

**College of Public Health, Room 3035**

**984388 Nebraska Medical Center**

**Omaha, NE 68198-4388**

**402.552.3394**

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*By UNMC, Central States Center for Agricultural  
Safety and Health, Omaha, NE*

### SHARPS

***Proper handling of medical sharps in livestock  
operations helps ensure safety and  
environmental stewardship.***

Because needlesticks are one of the most common injuries in large animal husbandry, producers should exercise caution to minimize the risk whenever sharps are used or are in the animals' environment. Sharps are items that can easily puncture skin, such as needles, razor blades, and broken glass. Recapping needles is a common cause of needlesticks, and the practice should be avoided whenever possible.

Both viruses and bacteria found in livestock operations can cause disease in humans. One link to disease in livestock handlers is the careless handling of items potentially contaminated with these organisms and the lack of proper hygiene.

To protect both humans and animals, the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, in “Safe Operating Procedure – Sharps Use and Handling with Livestock,” recommends that all sharps must be handled carefully and properly disposed of, including medical sharps used in livestock operations. The document provides “best practices and recommendations for working with sharps around large animals in a rural and farm setting.”

The first steps in safely using medical sharps include using the appropriate needle size/gauge. Use the smallest needle possible to complete the injection, but large enough to prevent the needle from breaking off in the muscle. Primary needle selection considerations include route of administration, animal size, and location/site. Secondary considerations in needle selection include how thick the fluid is and the volume/amount of fluid to be injected.

Tips for determining when to change needles:

- Immediately change the needle if it bends (NEVER USE BENT NEEDLES)
- If the needle becomes contaminated with feces, dirt, or irritating chemicals.
- If the needle point is damaged or burrs develop.
- Before the needle becomes dull (every 10-15 animals)
- Between livestock with known blood-borne infectious disease.
- Based on the veterinarian’s instructions.

When using medical livestock sharps, promptly dispose of them after use. Account for items before and after a procedure and before cleanup to help reduce preventable injuries.

A rigid sharps container is suitable for sharps disposal. These containers are available in various shapes and sizes. Do not use lightweight

plastic beverage containers since needles and scalpel blades can easily puncture these containers, leading to handler injury.

Any re-purposed containers used for sharps must satisfy the following requirements:

- Must be labeled as “Sharps.”
- Must be labeled as “Do Not Recycle.”
- Must be rigid, leak and puncture-proof, and sealable.

After disposing of sharps, tightly close the container lid. Properly wash your hands after handling medical sharps. And keep medical sharps containers out of the reach of children.

Best Practices for Safe Use.

1. DON'T set needles down in areas or on surfaces where the needle could subsequently stick anyone.
2. DO ensure that animals are restrained, to the extent possible, before uncapping a needle. Many needlestick injuries occur when attempting to use a needle on an unrestrained animal.
3. When applicable and feasible, to ensure user safety, needles should not be recapped.
4. When working chute-side, spent needles should be removed with pliers and disposed of in an appropriate sharps container. In some instances, the handler may replace the plastic needle cover to facilitate the removal of the needle from the syringe. The use of puncture-resistant gloves is encouraged.
5. In a pasture, range, or livestock pen setting, transporting an uncapped needle is unsafe.

6. NEVER recap a needle containing products that are toxic to humans.

7. All puncture wounds from an accidental needle stick are considered dangerous, regardless of the needle status (clean, sterile, or used). If a needle stick should occur, wash the area with soap and water. If on a job site, notify your supervisor, who should document the incident.

8. Do not dispose of needles and scalpels with everyday trash. Sharps should be placed in approved sharps containers. If using disposable syringes, do not remove the needle from the syringe before disposal; place the syringe with the attached needle into the sharps container. If a needle must be removed from a glass syringe or an auto-injector, mechanical means such as pliers should be used to remove the needle.

9. Fill the sharps container only 2/3 full to prevent potential injuries when disposing of sharps.

Following these simple steps can reduce the risk of infection and injury from sharps.

***Funding for this educational article comes from the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.***

[https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-sharps\\_use\\_%26\\_handling\\_livestock.pdf](https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-sharps_use_%26_handling_livestock.pdf)

<https://umash.umn.edu/farm-safety-check-sharps-handling-safety/>

[https://umash.umn.edu/upcp\\_product/sharps-disposal-and-safety-for-livestock-settings/](https://umash.umn.edu/upcp_product/sharps-disposal-and-safety-for-livestock-settings/)