



**Community Infection Prevention and Control
Policy for Domiciliary Care staff**

Safe disposal of waste, including sharps

**SAFE DISPOSAL OF WASTE,
INCLUDING SHARPS**

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Organisation:

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Job Title:

Adoption Date:

Review Date:

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1. Introduction

This Policy is one of the 'Standard infection control precautions' (SICPs) referred to by NHS England in the *National infection prevention and control manual (NIPCM) for England*.

Waste management is important to ensure waste does not pose a risk of injury or infection. In addition to safe working practices, appropriate management of waste has additional benefits in terms of cost and lessening the environmental impact of waste.

Service users are supported in a variety of different environments and domiciliary care staff have differing degrees of control and responsibility for the management of waste. All staff responsible for the management of waste should understand how to segregate and store waste before collection or disposal according to the hazard. Where any doubt exists, advice should be sought from the local environment agency or local authority.

Further information can also be found in the *Infection prevention and control: resource for adult social care* and the *Health Technical Memorandum 07-01: Safe and sustainable management of healthcare waste*.

Always use SICPs and, when required, 'Transmission based precautions' (TBPs), refer to the 'SICPs and TBPs Policy'.

When caring for service users in relation to any new or emerging infection, staff should refer to national infection prevention and control guidance on the disposal of waste, including sharps.

2. Risk assessment

An assessment of how waste will be disposed of will include:

- Who generates it and where the waste is generated
- Whether the waste contains blood or body fluids from a person with a confirmed or suspected infection
- Whether the waste is assessed as non-infectious, but has the potential to offend those who come into contact with it

The risk assessment is the responsibility of the multi-disciplinary team or lead professional, e.g. Manager.

3. Principles of waste management, including sharps

- Systems should be in place to ensure that waste is managed in a safe manner. Expensive waste streams, e.g. infectious, should only be used where indicated.
- Waste should be correctly segregated (see Section 4).
- When handling waste, appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn, and hands cleaned after removal.
- All outer packaging should be removed and recycled, where possible.
- Waste should be placed in an appropriate waste bag, no more than 2/3 full and tied using a suitable plastic zip tie or secure knot. Sharp items should not be disposed of into waste bags.
- Best practice is to use foot pedal operated waste bins with a lid and a liner. Where available, always use the foot pedal to open the lid to prevent hand contamination.
- Avoid expelling air from a waste bag while leaning over it as harmful micro-organisms, such as bacteria and viruses, may be released into the air.
- When handling tied waste bags, only hold the bag by the neck and keep at arms length to reduce the risk of contaminating your uniform/workwear or injury in case a sharp item has been inappropriately disposed of in the bag.
- If a waste bag awaiting collection is torn, the torn bag and contents should be placed inside a new waste bag.
- Whoever uses a sharp is responsible for its disposal, e.g. the service user if self-injecting, or the care worker if they used the sharp on the service user.
- Waste involving sharps, such as lancets used for checking blood sugar levels, should always be disposed of in a sharps container.
- Sharps containers must be located in a safe position. Containers should be taken to the point of use, and the temporary closure mechanism used when not in use.
- Only sharps waste should be disposed of in a sharps container.
- Sharps containers must be disposed of when the 'fill line' has been reached.
- The opening must be 'locked' prior to disposal.
- The sharps container should be disposed of as per local arrangement, e.g. returned to the GP surgery or pharmacy. They should not be disposed of in bin bags/wheelie bins.
- Further information on the safe use and disposal of sharps can be found in the 'Safe management of sharps and inoculation injuries Policy'.
- Hands should be cleaned after handling waste.

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4. Waste streams

Examples of waste streams in a service user's home, supported living or a sheltered housing complex include:

- Recycling
- Household waste
- Offensive/hygiene waste
- Clinical/infectious waste
- Sharps
- Medicines

Recycling

Information on the items that can be recycled can be obtained from the local authority.

Items that are recyclable which have been contaminated with food, drink or liquids, e.g. bottles, cans, should be rinsed before being placed in the recycling bin.

Household waste

Household waste should be put into a plastic bag and disposed of in the household waste stream.

If the waste is non-hazardous, and is appropriately bagged and sealed, it is acceptable for it to be disposed of in the household waste stream. This is usually the case with non-infectious dressings, personal hygiene products, nappies and incontinence pads.

Household waste can contain small quantities of offensive/hygiene or clinical/infectious waste. These can be double bagged and placed in the household waste stream with the householder's permission and where the quantity produced is less than 7 kg per collection.

Offensive/hygiene waste

Offensive/hygiene waste includes incontinence pads and other waste produced from human hygiene, e.g. sanitary waste, stoma bags, **which is non-infectious and which does not require specialist treatment or disposal**, but which may cause offence to those coming into contact with it.

Whether this type of waste can go into the household waste stream, as above, will depend upon the specific circumstances of each case. It will depend on a risk assessment (see Section 2). If a special waste collection is required, all offensive/hygiene waste should be placed in a yellow and black striped bag. The waste stream bag colour may vary depending on the waste contractor.

Further advice on the classification and disposal of offensive/hygiene waste can be sought from the service user's local environment agency or local authority.

Clinical/infectious waste

Waste is classified as clinical/infectious waste where:

- The service user is confirmed or suspected to have an infection
- Where an infection is not confirmed or suspected, but a potential risk of infection exists

If a risk assessment identifies waste as clinical/infectious, it should be placed into an orange infectious waste bag and collected as arranged with the local authority.

Further advice on the classification and disposal of infectious waste can be sought from the service user's local environment agency or local authority.

Sharps

Sharps should be disposed of immediately after use into an appropriate sharps container, e.g. yellow lidded sharps container for sharps contaminated with medicines, such as insulin needle/syringes, orange lidded sharps container for sharps not contaminated with medicines, such as lancets for checking blood sugar levels.

Medicines

Unwanted or date expired medicines should not be placed in the household waste or disposed of in a toilet or sink. Local arrangements for the disposal of unwanted/date expired medicines should be followed, e.g. return to the local pharmacy.

5. Infection Prevention and Control resources, education and training

The Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and IPC resources designed to assist your Domiciliary Care service in achieving compliance with the *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related resources* and CQC registration requirements.

These resources are either free to download from the website or available at a minimal cost covering administration and printing:

- 24 IPC Policy documents for Domiciliary Care staff
- Preventing Infection Workbook: Guidance for Domiciliary Care staff
- IPC audit tools, posters, packs, leaflets and factsheets
- IPC Bulletin for Domiciliary Care staff

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In addition, we hold IPC educational training events in North Yorkshire.

Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.

6. References

Department of Health and Social Care (2024) *Infection prevention and control: resource for adult social care*

Department of Health and Social Care (Updated December 2022) *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance*

NHS England (2022) *Health Technical Memorandum 07-01: Safe and sustainable management of healthcare waste*

NHS England (Updated 2024) *National infection prevention and control manual (NIPCM) for England*