

Issue: Small Sharps Containers (Emergency Response Kits)

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Background: A recent incident occurred with the small (approx 100ml) sharps containers issued for use in the standardised Emergency Response Kits (ERK). A needle penetrated the side wall, when it was deflected during insertion into the container.

An interim alert was issued to all health centres in Dec 06, with further review of the issue to be attended by the Best Practice Group.

Discussion: Any opportunities to reduce risk of needlestick injury are important to note.

The small sharps container in question does not have as ideal an inlet port as larger models, and the smallness of the container means a deflection will more readily cause the needle to reach the wall. The plastic wall of the container is also possibly a bit softer than the larger counterparts, nonetheless it takes considerable pressure to penetrate the wall. Utilising such pressure should be avoided when handling sharps.

The small containers have been sourced previously to accommodate the need for a compact solution within the ERK, where adequate, but minimised, content has always been desirable. A repeated review of the market has not provided another comparatively small alternative product.

The small sharps container kept in the ERK, should be disposed of on return from a trip where it has been used, replacing with a fresh unit.

In investigating this issue, another incident that occurred in a DHCS remote health centre some time ago was brought to light. This involved a Stores supplied 1.4 litre Sharps container being punctured following an outstation trip (see photograph below). Apparently there were not many contents in the container, so it is not likely that overt force was involved in the puncture, however the occurrence illustrates the potential that plastic sharps containers are not invincible.

Consultation: Within RHB

References: Product searches

Outcome: Use of the small Sharps Containers in the ERK is still recommended, in the absence of suitable commercial alternatives.

Alternative products will be considered if they become available.

The need for care in managing use and storage of used sharps containers is again flagged.

The manufacturers of the two products mentioned in this communiqué will be advised of the incidents that have occurred.



Needlestick injury to a Sharps container!