Managing the Regulatory Environment

ADA’s Guidelines for Practice Success™ (GPS™)

ADA Do’s and Don’ts for the Safe Handling of Instruments and Sharps

Do’s

- Consider every sharp item (needles, scalers, burs, lab knives, wires, etc.) that has been contaminated by patient blood and/or saliva potentially infective.
- Follow best practices for recapping used needles. One option is to use the one-handed scoop technique. Another is to use a device specifically designed to hold the needle cap while recapping needles, such as between multiple injections, in the operatory.
- Refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Division of Oral Health’s Device Screening and Evaluation Forms for guidance on how to evaluate anesthetic syringe devices with engineered safety features.
- When recapping used needles, always make sure the technique used directs the point of the needle away from the body.
- Always use a carrying tray, ideally one with a locking lid, with sides that are high enough to prevent instruments from rolling off.
- Make sure your sterilization room is set-up correctly.
  - Make sure a checklist that details all sterilization steps to be followed within the practice is posted in a prominent location.
  - Always follow CDC recommendations regarding the cleaning, disinfection and sterilization of dental equipment. That information is available in the Guidelines for Infection Control in Dental Health-Care Settings—2003. In 2016, CDC issued Infection Prevention & Control Guidelines & Recommendations which updated its previous guidelines and should be reviewed provides valuable updates to the agency’s 2003 guidelines.
  - Make sure the checklist stresses that the steps it details should be followed every time.
- Stay up-to-date on new products and innovations.
  - Evaluate safer sharps when possible.
- Always place used, disposable syringes and needles and other sharps in puncture-resistant containers or in the treatment room if required by the state’s OSHA plan.
  - All receptacles for used sharps should be close to the area(s) where sharps are used.
  - Make sure clinical staff can properly disassemble and reassemble any equipment, such as when they remove needles from syringes, remove scalpel blades, or remove burs from handpieces.
- Everyone should be vigilant about the proper storage of instruments and ensure that sterilized instruments are maintained separately from those in open or otherwise compromised packaging.
- Boost staff’s awareness about the proper use and handling of all sharps.
- Make certain that the practice’s procedures reflect CDC recommendations.
  - Provide access to resources that detail “what,” “how” and “why” the OSHA regulations relating to sharps are in place.
- CDC’s Summary of Infection Prevention Practices in Dental Settings: Basic Expectations for Safe Care contains helpful resources on many topics including sharps safety and safe injection practices.
Don’ts

• Never use both hands to recap used needles.
• No one should use soiled hands to select and remove instruments from drawers.
• Don’t assume that everyone knows everything or that they remember everything.
  o Make sure that every new hire, including temporary workers, know the practice’s procedures for handling sharps.
  o Provide training to all new personnel and have current personnel participate in “refresher” training sessions.
• Never dispose of any sharps, regardless of whether they’re used or unused, through either the regular or medical waste; they must always be placed in the designated sharps container.

Resources:

  CDC Device Screening and Evaluation Forms
  CDC Guidelines for Infection Control in Dental Health-Care Settings—2003
  CDC Infection Prevention & Control Guidelines & Recommendations
  CDC Summary of Infection Prevention Practices in Dental Settings: Basic Expectations for Safe Care