

Requirement for Physicians to Use Safety-Engineered Needles

Needle Safety Ontario Regulation 474/07

Effective July 1, 2010 Ontario Regulation 474/07 applies to all physicians' offices and practices where a worker is to use hollow-bore needles on patients for therapeutic, preventive, palliative, diagnostic or cosmetic purposes. Conventional hollow-bore needles must be replaced with safety-engineered needles that are appropriate for the task.

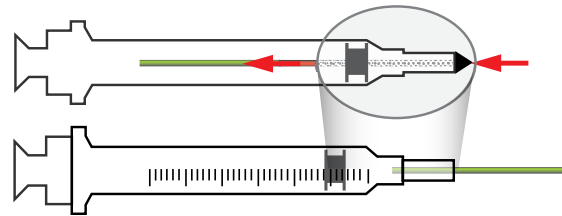
What is a Hollow-bore Safety-Engineered Needle?

In this regulation, a safety-engineered needle is defined as a hollow-bore needle that has been designed to eliminate or minimize the risk of a skin puncture or needlestick injury to the worker and is licensed as a medical device by Health Canada. Hollow-bore needles are typically used to administer medication and to withdraw blood or body fluid. Safety-engineered needles can also refer to a needleless device that replaces a hollow-bore needle and is licensed by Health Canada.

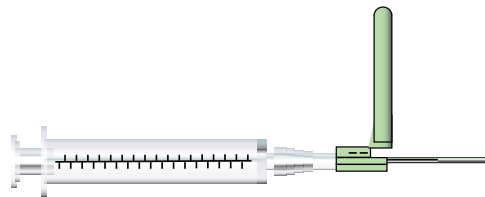
How Do Safety-Engineered Needles Work?

The two main types of safety-engineered needles are either "passive" or "active":

- The safety feature in the "passive" needle is automatic, meaning it requires no additional action on the part of the user; in the most common example, the needle automatically retracts into the barrel of the syringe following the injection.
- The safety feature in the "active" needle requires a voluntary action by the user to engage the safety device; in the most common example, a flip down guard is engaged by the user immediately following the injection to cover the used needle prior to disposal.



"Passive" Safety feature: Retractable Needle



"Active" Safety Feature: Flip-Down Guard

Accessing Safety-Engineered Needles

There are many products and brands of safety-engineered needles available from medical equipment suppliers. Arrange with the supplier for a demonstration and trial of various products to ensure the selection of the most appropriate products. Staff must be trained on the product(s) purchased.

Exceptions

Exceptions are dealt with case by case where:

1. Use of a safety-engineered needle will result in a risk of harm to a person or to a worker; or,
2. A safety engineered needle is not available.

However, when no safety-engineered needles are available for specialized practices, the obligation on employers to protect workers from the risk of skin puncture injuries through reinforcement of safe practice, safe disposal mechanisms, and education and training remains.

The Regulation provides for an exception to the requirement for the use of safety-engineered needles when there is a risk of harm to the worker using the needle, to another worker, or to the patient. Although not required, it is a good practice to document your reasons for not using a safety-engineered needle.

Frequently Asked Questions

I perform complex procedures using a conventional needle. What if I don't think it's safe for my patient if I use a safety-engineered needle for this procedure? Can I continue to use a regular needle?

As stated above, the Regulation permits an exception to the requirement for the use of safety-engineered needles in cases where there is a risk of harm to the worker using the needle, to another worker, or to the patient. Again, although it is not required, it is a good practice to document your reasons for not using a safety-engineered needle.

I work in a diabetic clinic. Do all of our diabetic products including insulin syringes/needles, insulin pens and lancets have to be safety-engineered?

The Regulation covers workers who use hollow-bore needles and does not cover patients. If the patient administers his or her own tests and medication, a safety-engineered needle is not required. However, whenever procedures using a hollow-bore needle are performed by a nurse, physician or other health care worker, safety-engineered needles are required.

I am a physician and the only person in my office who uses needles. Since I am self-employed and not putting any staff at risk by giving injections, do I have to use safety-engineered needles?

The *Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act* requires self-employed persons to ensure that the equipment, materials and protective devices prescribed by the Regulations are provided and used as directed. Therefore, self-employed health care providers are required, effective July 1, 2010, to use safety-engineered needles as prescribed by the *Needle Safety Regulation*.

I perform a procedure in my office that requires an extra-long needle. I don't think there is an appropriate safety-engineered needle available for this procedure, what am I required to do?

Safety-engineered needles are not available for every type of procedure. You should research product availability by asking your medical equipment supplier, conducting an Internet search and consulting with your colleagues. You should then document your findings. If an appropriate safety-engineered needle is not available, you should continue to use an appropriate conventional needle. It is good practice to regularly review the availability of different types of safety-engineered needles, and to implement their use as they become available.

Resources

International Sharps Injury Prevention Society:
Sharps Safety Products by Category (view safety needle product information)
www.isips.org/safety_products.html

Needle Safety Regulation:
www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/source/regs/english/2007/elaws_src_regs_r07474_e.htm

OSACH Planning Guide: Implementation of Safety Engineered Medical Sharps:
www.osach.ca/products/SEMS/