

## Handle waste with care

### ■ Read the passage and answer the questions below.

Improper **handling** and **disposal** of healthcare **wastes** (also sometimes called medical waste) puts the health worker, the patient and the community at large at risk through transmission of **pathogens** via blood or body fluids, contaminated medical equipment, or **sharp** instruments

Healthcare waste can be defined as any waste produced by healthcare activities. It may also be known as medical waste, hospital waste or infectious waste.

Healthcare waste can be put into one of two **broad** categories; non-**hazardous** 'general waste' and hazardous 'healthcare risk waste'.

Between 75% and 90% of the waste produced in healthcare is general waste. This includes papers, **packaging** materials, **dust** and similar. This can be **disposed of** in the same way as other non-hazardous wastes, but only if it is not contaminated by contact with hazardous wastes. The remaining 10-25% of waste is hazardous and could be composed of sharps (**needles**, **lancets**, etc.), syringes, blood or body fluid, contaminated surgical instruments, used **gauzes** and gloves, **plasters**, etc. It may also contain expired medications, laboratory reagents and other **chemicals**. The main concern here should be on managing the hazardous wastes in a safe way. However, also non-hazardous wastes, because poor handling and segregation can be contaminated with hazardous materials.

Hazardous healthcare waste is categorized into:

- infectious waste: waste that may contain pathogens. This includes used materials or equipment that have been in contact with infected patients. It also includes liquid waste such as faeces, urine, blood and other body secretions;
- pathological waste: human tissues including placentas, body parts, blood and foetuses;
- anatomical waste: it is a sub-group of pathological waste and consists of recognisable body parts;
- sharps: needles, **infusion sets**, **blades** and broken glass;
- pharmaceutical waste: expired or no longer needed pharmaceuticals; items contaminated by or containing pharmaceuticals (bottles, boxes);
- genotoxic waste: substances with genotoxic properties (meaning they can cause genetic damage), such as certain medications and genotoxic chemicals;
- chemical waste: wastes containing chemical substances such as laboratory reagents, disinfectants that are expired or no longer needed, and solvents;
- waste with high content of heavy metals: it includes batteries, broken thermometers, blood-pressure gauges, etc.;
- pressurised containers: gas cylinders, gas **cartridges** and aerosol **cans**;



- radioactive waste: containing radioactive substances from radiotherapy or laboratory research.

There are a number of basic guidelines for waste handling.

All healthcare waste should be **segregated** and placed into **waste bins** by the person generating the waste at the point where waste is generated. All specific healthcare waste segregation, packaging and **labelling** needs to be explained to the medical and supporting staff. Information should be **displayed** in charts on the walls of each room. Carts and recyclable containers used for transport of healthcare waste should be disinfected after each use. Sanitary staff and **cleaners** must wear proper protective clothing at all times when handling infectious waste including face masks, aprons, boots, and **heavy-duty** gloves.

Segregation is the process of separating different categories of waste. Healthcare waste is usually segregated into **colour-coded** waste bags or bins. This should take place at the source (when the waste is created). You should follow the guidelines for segregation of waste so that the different types of waste are kept separate and each can be handled safely.

Healthcare facilities should provide coloured waste containers specifically for each category of waste. The colour-coding system **aims** to

ensure immediate, easy and unambiguous (clear) identification and segregation of the waste. Based on the type of **hazards** involved, a different colour code and type of container is assigned.

**to aim:** *puntare*  
**blade:** *lama*  
**broad:** *ampio*  
**can:** *recipiente (metallico)*  
**cartridge:** *cartuccia*  
**chemical:** *sostanza chimica*  
**cleaner:** *addetto alle pulizie*  
**colour-coded:** *contraddistinto da un colore*  
**to display:** *esporre*  
**disposal:** *smaltimento, eliminazione*  
**to dispose of:** *eliminare, gettare via*  
**dust:** *polvere*  
**gauze:** *garza*  
**handling:** *maneggio, trattamento*  
**hazard:** *rischio*  
**hazardous:** *rischioso*  
**heavy-duty:** *di protezione per lavori pesanti*  
**infusion set:** *fleboclisi*  
**labelling:** *etichettatura*  
**lancet:** *bisturi*  
**needle:** *ago*  
**packaging:** *imballaggio*  
**pathogen:** *agente patogeno*  
**plaster:** *cerotto*  
**to segregate:** *isolare, separare*  
**sharp:** *tagliante*  
**waste bin:** *contenitore per rifiuti*  
**waste:** *materiale di scarto*

1. Why is proper handling of healthcare waste important?
2. What does healthcare waste consist in?
3. What are the two categories of healthcare waste?
4. What does the majority of healthcare waste consist in?
5. What is hazardous healthcare waste categorized into?
6. What is infectious waste?
7. What is pathological waste?
8. What are sharps?
9. Where and by whom should healthcare waste be segregated?
10. Why are waste bags or bins colour-coded?