

Clinical Waste Disposal

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Clinical waste regulations are there to help prevent the spread of infection. Organisations must understand the risk posed by waste, have policies to deal with and monitor its disposal.



Introduction

To reduce the risks posed by clinical waste, all employers must make sure it is properly controlled and disposed of. This is done by first assessing the risks, then developing policies and putting arrangements in place to manage the risks, followed by continued monitoring.

Classification of Clinical Waste

Clinical waste falls into two main categories:

1. Waste which poses a risk of infection
2. Medicinal waste

The Controlled Waste Regulations 1992, later replaced by the [Controlled Waste \(England & Wales\) Regulations 2012](#), define clinical waste as any waste consisting wholly or partly of:

- Human or animal tissue
- Blood or other bodily fluids
- Excretions
- Drugs or other pharmaceutical products
- Swabs and dressings
- Syringes, needles or other sharp instruments

This also includes any waste which arises from:

- Medical, nursing, dental, veterinary, pharmaceutical or similar practices
- Investigation, treatment, care, teaching or research
- The collection of blood for transfusion

In summary, this means any waste which, unless rendered safe, may prove hazardous to someone coming into contact with it.

Hazards Posed by Clinical Waste

A wide range of infections can occur if clinical waste comes into contact with a **person's** broken skin, eyes, nose, or mouth – so it's important for workplaces to consider all biological waste as infectious.

Here are some examples of diseases which can be transmitted by clinical waste:

- Various forms of hepatitis
- Escherichia coli (E. coli)
- Tuberculosis
- Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)
- Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)
- Digestive issues such as diarrhoea, and complications arising from them

Employees at Risk

Employees in the healthcare sector such as doctors and nurses are at risk of contact with clinical waste. So too are residential care home staff, and waste disposal workers.

Protecting Employees

It is important that all employees who are exposed to clinical waste during their work are educated about the risks and follow the necessary precautions regarding personal hygiene and protective barriers.

Education

- Employers must provide information to their employees and anyone else who may come into contact with clinical waste on the health hazards and risks it poses.
- Employees should be trained on the need for, and correct use of, personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Employees should be trained on safe handling and disposal of clinical waste.
- Everyone at risk must be instructed on who to report to if they are exposed to clinical waste, and where to get immediate treatment.

Personal Hygiene

- Frequent hand washing is an effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in the workplace. Hygienic washroom facilities must be provided, including hot water, soap and towels.
- Employees should wash their hands thoroughly, by wetting the soap and lathering their hands for at least 20 seconds, especially after contact with bodily waste, or any contaminated objects or surfaces.
- As part of their hand washing routine, employees should also wash and scrub their fingernails and cuticles with a small brush, and rinse their hands thoroughly before drying.

Protective Barriers

- Good quality gloves should be provided by employers and wherever possible, worn by anyone who is likely to come into contact with clinical waste.
- Gloves must be worn when disinfecting contaminated surfaces and disposing of used and biological materials. After removing gloves, employees should also wash their hands thoroughly with warm water and soap.
- Gloves should be changed after each task and disposed of as contaminated waste.
- In line with the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at Work Regulations 1992, employers must provide personal protective equipment, make sure it's in good condition, train employees to use it correctly, and ensure they're using it when needed.
- Protective barriers reduce the risk of exposure to potentially infectious material through contact with broken skin or mucous membranes, so any break in the skin should be kept covered with waterproof dressings.
- Protective safety spectacles and a mask must be provided and worn when there's a risk of blood, bodily fluids or faeces splashing onto the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Gowns, lab coats or aprons must be provided and worn when there's a likelihood of clothing becoming soiled. Contaminated clothing and linen should be laundered at a temperature of at least 80°C, cleaned by a specialist company or incinerated.

Additional Information about Latex Gloves

Latex gloves can cause allergic reactions, so employees should restrict their use to essential situations like when there's a risk of contamination from blood or other bodily fluids.

Other types of gloves, such as nitrile gloves, can be used for general procedures, but aren't considered a universal replacement for latex gloves.

Employees should be screened for latex allergies and offered alternatives if needed.

Safe Handling and Disposal of Contaminated Material

Special precautions must be followed when disposing of clinical and biological waste, and materials which have been contaminated. Training must also be provided for employees and anyone else who may be exposed, such as volunteers.

Employers need a written Disposal of Contaminated Waste Procedure for the safe disposal of contaminated waste. The UK Government recommends that a member of senior management is appointed as a clinical waste control officer, overseeing the clinical waste policy.

A Disposal of Contaminated Waste Procedure should include the following guidance:

- Dispose of clinical waste in puncture-resistant containers, lined with leak-proof plastic bags and marked as 'biological waste'.
- Presume all biological waste is infectious.
- Wear puncture-resistant gloves and handle all contaminated waste carefully to avoid direct contact.
- Hold only the outside of the container when handling, and never reach in.
- Do not load containers beyond capacity or compact the contents.
- Never mix biological waste with other domestic or workplace rubbish.
- Sharp objects which can cut, or puncture skin may carry infectious materials always handle them with care and follow safe 'sharps' practice.

Disposal of Clinical Waste Regulations

There are strict controls in place to make sure that clinical waste is managed safely and recovered or disposed of without harming the environment or human health.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990

Under the [Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) (EPA) it's unlawful to deposit, recover or dispose of controlled (including clinical) waste:

- Without a waste management licence
- Contrary to the conditions of a licence or the terms of an exemption
- In any way which causes pollution of the environment or harm to human health

Contravention of waste controls is a criminal offence. Section 34 of the EPA places those concerned with controlled waste (including clinical waste) under a 'Duty of Care' to ensure the waste is managed properly, recovered or disposed of safely, and is only transferred to someone who is authorised to keep it. Household waste is exempt in respect of their own household waste.

LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

Hazardous Waste Regulations

Some waste is considered to present a particularly high risk to health or the environment and requires special handling and treatment. The [Hazardous Waste Regulations](#), which came into force in July 2005, set out the control and tracking of hazardous waste in England and Wales. Under these regulations, a process of registration of hazardous waste producers was introduced, as well as a new system for recording the movement of waste.

“From 1st April 2016, premises in England no longer need to register as hazardous waste producers with the Environment Agency (EA). This change only applies to England; it does not affect premises in Wales who should continue to register with Natural Resources Wales.”

Definition of Hazardous Waste

Waste is defined as hazardous if it's listed in the List of Waste Regulations. This is a copy of the European Waste Catalogue (EWC) list, produced by the European Commission following the Hazardous Waste Directive 1991.

There are other ways in which waste can be defined as hazardous, for example, if the Secretary of State says it is, or if it's classified as hazardous in other legislation (such as controlling asbestos disposal). However, for the majority of waste, it's best to refer to the List of Waste and the EWC.

The Environment Agency is responsible for administering information on hazardous waste. Guidance on how to assess the hazardous properties of waste can be found in Annexe C of their document:

[Technical Guidance WM3: Guidance on the Classification and Assessment of Waste.](#)

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Sources and Useful Links

- [Biosafety – Resources](#): Health and Safety Executive
- [Health Technical Memorandum – Safe Management of Healthcare Waste](#): Department of Health

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LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS