

Safety Pen Needles and Safety Lancets – Prescribing and Commissioning Position Statement

Safety pen needles and safety lancets should not be prescribed for use by healthcare professionals or paid care staff. Safer sharps devices required for staff use must be supplied by the employing organisation.

Prescribing may be considered where the device is intended for use by a patient or an unpaid carer, and there is a clinical risk of sharps injury to the patient or another unpaid person involved in administering injections or performing capillary blood glucose testing.

Purpose

This commissioning statement sets out the prescribing position for safety pen needles and safety lancet devices in primary care across NHS Shropshire Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board.

Scope

This policy applies to prescribing in primary care for patients of all ages who require insulin injections or capillary blood glucose testing in the community. Where injections or blood glucose testing are undertaken by staff as part of their employment (for example healthcare staff, school staff, prison staff or care home staff), safer sharps devices must be supplied by the employing organisation.

Definitions

Safety pen needle – A pen needle designed with a safety mechanism (for example a protective shield or retractable needle) to reduce the risk of accidental sharps injury.

Safety lancet – A single-use device used for capillary blood sampling where the needle retracts or is shielded after use.

Unpaid carer – A family member, friend or other individual who assists with injections or blood glucose testing but is not employed to provide care.

Background

Safety pen needles and safety lancets were introduced to reduce the risk of accidental sharps injuries, particularly among healthcare workers. Historically, sharps injuries commonly occurred when healthcare staff administered injections or handled used needles.

The Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013 require employers to supply safer sharps devices where reasonably practicable to reduce the risk of sharps injury and exposure to blood-borne viruses.

Commissioning Position

1. Not Routinely Prescribed

Safety pen needles and safety lancet devices should NOT be routinely prescribed in Primary Care (GP practices) and should not be prescribed on a FP10 for use by healthcare professionals or employees. Safer sharps devices must be provided by the employing organisation in accordance with the Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013. A range of suitable devices is available and employing organisations are responsible for ensuring that staff are appropriately trained in their correct use and disposal.

Responsibility for provision of these devices for staff use rests with the employing organisation and should not be transferred to, or requested of, Primary Care clinicians, except in exceptional circumstances.

2. May Be Prescribed (Exceptional Circumstances Only)

Safety pen needles and safety lancets may be prescribed for individuals who are not healthcare professionals or employees, particularly where support is provided by an unpaid carer or family member.

Prescribing should only be considered where there is a clinically assessed increased risk of accidental sharps injury to the patient or another unpaid person involved in administering injections or performing capillary blood glucose testing.

Exceptional circumstances may include:

- Where injections or blood glucose testing are performed by an unpaid carer or family member.
- Where there is an identified risk of blood-borne virus transmission.
- Where the patient has cognitive impairment, behavioural disturbance, or is likely to become distressed or resist injections or testing, increasing the risk of accidental sharps injury.
- Where a reasonable adjustment is required, such as significant visual impairment, physical disability, cognitive impairment, behavioural risk, or severe needle phobia.
- Where injections or testing occur in higher-risk environments (e.g. custodial settings such as prisons), particularly where there is increased risk of self-harm, misuse, or unsafe handling of sharps.

Where prescribing is clinically appropriate, prescribers should select the most cost-effective formulary option from the Shropshire Telford and Wrekin formulary. Alternative safety devices may be used where clinically appropriate.

Practice Guidance for Prescribers

Requests for the prescribing safety devices for staff use should normally be declined. The employing organisation should be advised to procure appropriate safer sharps devices in line with its statutory responsibilities.

When safety devices are prescribed for patients or unpaid carers, the clinical rationale should be clearly documented in the patient record and prescribing reviewed periodically.

- Ensure patient education on the safe disposal of needles via a sharps bin.
- Sharpsguard yellow 1litre / Sharpsafe yellow 1 litre are suitable for insulin needles and lancets and are available on FP10
- Needles are available in different sizes; Use needles of shorter length and smaller diameter. to prevent intramuscular injection.
- The Forum for Injection Technique (FIT) UK considers the 4mm needle to be the safest pen needle for adults and children regardless of age, gender and Body Mass Index (BMI). Using needles of a shorter length helps to prevent intramuscular injection of insulin. (IM injection of insulin should be avoided as it can result in unpredictable blood glucose levels).

Responsibility for Providing Safety Sharps Devices

Responsibility for providing safer sharps devices depends on who is administering the injection or blood glucose test.

Situation	Who provides safety device
Patient self-injects insulin or self-tests blood glucose *	GP practice / Primary Care
District nurse administers injection/test	Employer (community NHS provider organisation)
Diabetes specialist nurse administers injection/test	Employer (NHS provider organisation)
Community pharmacy staff administer injection (e.g. vaccination)	Pharmacy employer / contractor
Training by healthcare staff (district nurses, diabetes nurses, pharmacists)	Employer of the healthcare professional
Care home staff administer injection/test	Care home employer
Domiciliary / agency carers administer injection/test	Employing care provider
School staff administer injection/test	School employer
Prison staff administer injection/test	Prison service
Unpaid carer (family member or friend) assists	May be prescribed by GP practice/ Primary Care if risk of sharps injury

**Patients who self-inject insulin should use standard pen needles and lancets unless exceptional circumstances apply.*

References

- Health and Safety Executive. Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013. Available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hsis7.htm>
- NHS England. Items which should not routinely be prescribed in primary care. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/items-which-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-policy-guidance/>
- NHS Business Services Authority. Drug Tariff. Available at: <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/pharmacies-gp-practices-and-appliance-contractors/drug-tariff>
- OpenPrescribing.net prescribing indicators for insulin pen needles. Available at: <https://openprescribing.net/>
- Forum for Injection Technique (FIT) UK. Injection Technique Recommendations. Available at: <https://fit4diabetes.com/>
- Care Quality Commission. Handling sharps in adult social care. Available at: <https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/adult-social-care/handling-sharps-adult-social-care>
- Shropshire Telford and Wrekin Formulary <https://www.shropshireandtelfordformulary.nhs.uk/>
- NHS Electronic Drug Tariff <https://www.drugtariff.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/#/00903569-DC/DC00903566/Home>