Infectious Waste Encyclopedia Article

Infectious Waste

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Infectious Waste

Infectious waste is that portion of medical waste that is contaminated with pathogens that may be able to transmit an infectious disease; it is also referred to as regulated medical waste. Infectious waste represents a small percentage (usually between 5 and 15 percent) of a health care facility's total waste stream. In the United States each state defines and sets standards for management, treatment and disposal of infectious waste. Most definitions concur that the following wastes should be classified as infectious waste: sharps (i.e., needles, scalpels, etc.), laboratory cultures and stocks, blood and blood products, pathological wastes, and wastes generated from patients in isolation because they are known to have an infectious disease. Infectious wastes can be treated (disinfected or sterilized) by thermal or chemical means prior to disposal.

For an infectious disease to be transmitted from contact with waste, there must be a sufficient concentration of pathogens (e.g., bacteria, viruses), a portal of entry, a mode of transmission, and sufficient virulence of the pathogen to affect a susceptible host. As a result the wastes of greatest concern in transmitting diseases are sharps (needles, scalpels, etc.).

Bibliography

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World Health Organization. (1999). *Safe Management of Wastes from Health-Care Activities,* edited by A. Pruss, E. Giroult, and P. Rushbrook. Geneva: World Health Organization Publications.

Internet Resource

Centers for Disease Control Web site. Available from http://www.cdc.com.