



## Second-hand goods: A guide for retailers

Second-hand goods are generally found to be in a good state of repair and cleanliness, but there is a small risk of infection or infestation from goods such as second-hand clothing or bedding.

### Recycling of second-hand goods

The sale of second-hand articles occurs on a relatively large scale throughout South Australia. Retail outlets for second-hand goods fall into two categories; commercial enterprises and charitable organisations.

Second hand goods can also be purchased at garage sales, car boot sales, fetes and on the internet.

Second-hand goods are often donated and are generally found to be in a good state of repair and cleanliness.

### Is there a risk to health?

There is a small risk of infection or infestation from second-hand goods such as clothing or bedding.

Bacterial organisms such as streptococci and staphylococci are very unlikely to survive on clothing or bedding in sufficient numbers and long enough to cause a health risk to the purchaser.

Parasites (including fungi) however, may survive for extended periods of time. While transmission of these organisms is also unlikely, some second-hand goods may result in a risk to health if they are not thoroughly cleaned before use.

### What are the risks

#### Scabies

Scabies is an infectious skin condition caused by the mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*.

Transmission primarily occurs through direct contact with an infested person and to a lesser extent contaminated clothing and bedding (scabies mites can survive for up to 4 days off the human host).

#### Body lice

The louse species *Pediculus humanis* feeds on human blood and lives between the skin and clothing of humans. Transmission can occur through infested clothing, bedding and furniture as lice are able to survive for up to 5 days off the human host. Body lice are uncommon in Australia.

#### Pubic lice (crabs)

*Phthirus pubis* feed on human blood and are commonly found in areas of sparse, coarse hair such as pubic areas, eyebrows and beards. Sexual contact is the most common form of transmission, but sharing recently contaminated beds, bedding and clothing may also result in infestation as lice can survive off the human host for 1-2 days.

#### Head lice

*Pediculus capitus* live and feed on the human head. Close head to head contact is the most common form of transmission, although infested items such as hair ties, hats and scarves may pose a low risk as head lice can survive off the human head for 1-2 days.



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## Bed bugs

*Cimex lectularius* or the common bed bug lives in cracks and crevices of beds and bedroom furniture and feeds on human blood. Bed bugs are able to survive for long periods of time without a blood meal (adult bugs for more than a year) and can be transported in furniture, bedding and clothing.

## Tinea (ringworm/athlete's foot/jock itch)

Fungal infection of the skin, nails or hair which is highly contagious. Tinea can be transmitted from direct skin-to-skin contact or via contaminated clothing, footwear and surfaces such as shower floors. Shed skin scales can remain infectious for prolonged periods in the environment.

## Impetigo (school sores)

Skin infection caused by staphylococcus or streptococcus bacteria, or both. Impetigo is highly contagious through skin to skin contact and to a far lesser extent by handling clothing or other contaminated items.

## Processing second-hand goods

All second-hand articles should be treated as potentially infective during the sorting process. There are some precautions that can be taken to reduce the risk to staff handling such items:

- Cover all cuts and abrasions with a suitable waterproof dressing before handling goods
- Wear gloves
- Look inside the item thoroughly before inserting your hands. For example, remove shoe laces and pull the tongue back to inspect shoes instead of putting your hand inside
- Wash your hands after handling second-hand goods and before eating, drinking or smoking

Second-hand goods should be sorted as they arrive to ensure that clean goods are stored separately from those requiring cleaning and repair. Needles, pins or other sharp or dangerous objects should be carefully removed from goods during the sorting process. Grossly contaminated items (such as items with blood, faeces or vomit present) should be discarded and not offered for sale.

## How to clean second-hand goods

Washing items in hot water (at least 60°C) and/or heated tumble drying or ironing is adequate to ensure second-hand items are clean and present no risk to health. Items that cannot be washed such as toys, pillows and delicates can be dry cleaned or sealed in a plastic bag for five days or placed on high heat in a tumble dryer for 10 minutes.

Chemical disinfection can also be considered for articles that cannot be washed. This method should only be used when necessary and disinfectants need to be carefully selected for their suitability.

Retailers may wish to consider using signage to indicate which items are second-hand and if the item has been washed/cleaned.

## What do I do if I find a syringe?

Syringes have been found in a variety of goods such as handbags, shoes, toiletry bags and furniture donated to charity organisations. Although the risk of infection from discarded syringes is low, precautions should always be taken when attempting to dispose of a syringe:

- Use a special sharps disposal container (or a rigid-walled, puncture resistant container with a secure lid, such as a glass jar or

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- coffee tin) big enough to take the whole syringe
- Take the sharps container to the syringe and place it on the floor with the lid removed
- Using tongs or kevlar gloves, pick up the syringe on the barrel end.
- Do not attempt to re-cap the needle
- Place the syringe into the container with the sharp end first, but do not attempt to hold the container while doing so. Ensure that the syringe is well below the cap line, then secure the lid on the container
- Wash hands with running water and soap
- For disposal advice contact the Drug and Alcohol Services Needle Clean-up Hotline on 1300 131 340. Your local council or hospital may also be able to offer assistance.

**Note:** Waste contractors can supply and exchange sharps disposal units and some local councils also operate sharps container exchange programs.

## What about needlestick injuries?

Staff/handlers of second-hand goods must give serious attention to the potential for needlestick injuries.

Only a small number of accidental exposures to blood result in infection, but the following key steps should be taken if a needlestick injury occurs:

- Allow wound to bleed freely
- Thoroughly wash the injured area with soap and water
- Seek medical advice from a doctor or hospital ideally within 1 to 2 hours of exposure
- Place the needle/sharp in a rigid-walled container for transportation to the doctors or hospital (do not attempt to cover a needle because you run the risk of further injury)

- Document the incident, including the date and time of the incident, and how it occurred
- Investigate the circumstances of the accident and take measures to prevent it happening again.

More detailed information is available from the Infection Control Guideline, Chapter 23 and Appendix 8 at [www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/icg-guidelines-index.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/icg-guidelines-index.htm)

## Should I be vaccinated?

Although the risk of contracting a blood-borne infection such as hepatitis B from a needlestick injury is very low, retailers should always practice care when handling second-hand goods. Those with direct contact with goods may wish to consider being vaccinated against hepatitis B.

## Further information

- Your local council Environmental Health Officer
- The Department of Health on 8226-7100 or go to our website: [www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environmental-health-index.htm](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environmental-health-index.htm)

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