

Sharps (Needles & Lancets) Disposal

The following procedures are intended for used needles and other sharps from a household only.

The most common infectious/medical wastes produced by households are needles and other sharps such as lancets. These wastes should always be properly packaged for disposal for the protection of yourself and subsequent waste handlers. Waste generated by in-home nursing care is considered to be household waste.

Save for Collection

The preferred method for the management of used needles and other sharps is to collect them in a sharps container and send them to a commercial medical waste disposal company for disposal. There are many commercially available mail-in programs available, as well as a few medical waste disposal companies that you can contract with to pick up and dispose of these wastes for you. If available in your area, pick up service providers may be found in your local yellow pages under "Waste Disposal - Medical."

Some mail-back disposal systems may be available at your local pharmacy or through your health care provider.

Other options include:

Waste Management Inc.	(877) 927-8363
Becton-Dickinson (BD)	(888) 232-2737
AllegroMedical.com	(800) 861-3211
Bio-Express Inc	(877) 282-5222
Sharps Compliance, Inc.	(800) 772 5657 http://www.sharpsinc.com/HowTheSystemWorks.htm
Stericycle	(866) 783-7422 http://www.stericycle.com/consumer-needle-disposal.html

Mail-back systems generally include a sharps container, packaging materials, and pre-paid shipping.

To extend the capacity of your sharps container, you may want to use a needle clipping device (do not use regular scissors because there isn't a needle guard to keep the needle from flying off in a random direction). Once the needle is safely clipped off, it can be placed in the sharps container and the rest of the syringe disposed of in the trash.

Disposal

Used needles and other sharps should never be placed loosely in your trash or flushed down the toilet. They should always be placed in a rigid container with a screw-on or other tightly secured lid. Rigid plastic laundry detergent or empty bleach bottles, with screw top lids, and coffee cans, where the lid can be taped on with duct tape, work well because they are strong enough to prevent the sharps from poking through the container. Plastic milk bottles are a poor choice because they are generally made of thin plastic that can be easily punctured by a needle or lancet. Glass should never be used as a sharps container because the glass can break and compound the hazard. Recyclable containers should not be used as home sharps containers unless obviously labeled as containing sharps. Sharps are not recyclable and not only can they pose an infection risk to workers at the recycling facility, they can render the whole batch of recyclables unusable.

Once filled, the container should be firmly sealed and labeled to prevent accidental tampering. The sealed container can then be placed in your regular trash. Trash that includes a sealed sharps container should be kept out of the reach of children and pets until it can be picked up by your trash disposal service or taken to the landfill.

A variety of products are available that destroy sharps and make them safer for disposal in the trash. Some of these melt the needle and syringe into a less harmful plastic "puck," and some destroy the needle or otherwise render it harmless. Sharps destruction units have a higher initial cost, but may be more cost effective in the long run depending on how many sharps you generate.