



Safe Options for Home Needle Disposal

Every year millions of people throughout the country use billions of needles, syringes, and lancets – also called sharps – to manage medical conditions at home. Finding ways to safely dispose of used medical sharps is an important public health priority.

Those who use sharps must be aware of proper disposal methods to avoid haphazard disposal habits and accidental exposure to used sharps. Although needle-stick injuries are occupational hazards for sanitation, house-keeping, and janitorial workers, children and pets are also at risk for being stuck by improperly discarded used sharps. Needle-stick injuries are a preventable health risk and specific actions can be taken to protect yourself and others.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) has identified several types of safe and convenient disposal methods for people who give themselves medical injections. When possible, the following sharps disposal methods are preferred over placing the sharps in the solid waste receptacle:



Drop Off Collection Sites

Check with appropriate collection sites such as local doctors' offices, hospitals, health clinics, pharmacies, health departments, community organizations, police and fire stations and medical waste facilities.

Please note, sharps are not accepted at Illinois Household Hazardous Waste Collection sites.

Mail back Programs

Mail-back programs may be available for individual use by sharps users, and can also serve as a disposal method for community collection sites. Used sharps are placed in special containers and are mailed in accordance with U.S. Postal Service requirements.

These programs work especially well for rural communities, facilities that don't already have a medical waste pick-up service and individuals who wish to protect their privacy. These programs can reduce or eliminate the danger of sharps by entering into the waste stream. Please be aware that this service usually involves a fee.

Home sharp users should practice the following guidelines if the previously mentioned options are not available:



- Medical sharps may be placed in either a medical sharps container purchased from a pharmacy or health care provider, or in a heavy-plastic or metal container.
- Household containers, such as plastic detergent bottles, can be used if heavy duty tape is used to secure the lid to the container and the words "Do Not Recycle" are written on the container with a permanent marker.
- Never place the container in the recycle bin.
- The container should also be puncture-proof with a tight-fitting lid.
- Please refrain from using a clear or glass container.
- Please do not overfill the containers.
- Please keep the containers out of reach from children and pets.



Frequently Asked Questions

What does “Medical Sharps” mean?

Medical Sharps (syringes, hypodermic needles, needles attached to tubing, lancets, etc.) are considered biohazardous medical waste. Since ‘sharps’ potentially have disease-carrying blood or other bodily fluids on them, which can live on these objects for over a week, they are capable of ‘injecting’ that contaminated blood or fluid into anyone who comes in contact with them.

What are sharps used for?

People use sharps to treat various kinds of medical conditions in the home, and the number of conditions treated at home with injectable medicines continues to rise.

If someone uses sharps for medical conditions that are not contagious (like diabetes or allergies), why is it important to dispose of the syringes, needles and lancets properly?

For those community workers and the general public who may come into contact with contaminated needles, the risk factor appears the same because it is impossible to know whether needles have been used on a diabetic cat or on a person with HIV. There are millions of people in the U.S. infected with hepatitis B and C, HIV, syphilis, or other contagious diseases which can be contracted from a stick with a used hypodermic needle.

Why can’t needles/syringes be thrown in the trash?

Some sharps users throw their used needles in the trash or flush them down the toilet. Used sharps left loose among other waste can hurt sanitation workers during collections, at sorting and recycling facilities, and at landfills, or become lodged in equipment, forcing workers to remove them by hand. Children, adults, and even pets are at risk for needle-stick injuries when sharps are disposed of improperly at home or in public settings like parks.

For More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

Provides links to state websites to learn more about public health laws and regulations affecting community syringe disposal options

<http://www.cdc.gov/needledisposal/il/index.htm>

SafeNeedleDisposal.org:

Information related to community needle disposal programs and needle mail-back programs offered by pharmaceutical companies.

<http://www.safeneedledisposal.org/>

Earth 911 / Household Hazardous Waste Section:

Users can enter their zip code and view a list of sharps disposal programs available in their area

<http://www.earth911.com/>

United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA):

Learn more about safe community needle disposal

<http://www.epa.gov/wastes/nonhaz/industrial/medical/disposal.htm>

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA):

Learn about proper medication disposal in Illinois

<http://www.epa.illinois.gov/topics/waste-management/waste-disposal/medication-disposal>



Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
1021 North Grand Avenue East
Post Office Box 19276
Springfield, Illinois 62794-9276

Phone: 217-782-3397

Fax: 217-782-9039

www.epa.illinois.gov