

HOUSEHOLD SHARPS DISPOSAL



SOLID WASTE SECTION



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that each year, 8 million people across the country use more than 3 billion needles, syringes and lancets (also called sharps) to manage medical conditions at home. Home-generated sharps must be properly managed to prevent injury by unintentional sticks or disease transmission. People at the greatest risk of being stuck

by used sharps include sanitation and sewage treatment workers, janitors and housekeepers, and children.

DANGERS

Many self-injectors are unaware of the safe disposal methods and simply throw used needles in the trash or flush them down the toilet. Used sharps left loose among other waste can hurt sanitation workers during collection rounds, at sorting and recycling facilities, and at landfills. Sharps can become lodged in equipment, forcing workers to remove them by hand. People exposed to sharps face not only the risk of a painful stick, but also the risk of contracting a disease such as HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis B or C. All needle-stick injuries are treated as if the needle carries a disease. Victims of sharps-related injuries face the cost of post-injury testing, disease prevention measures and counseling, even if no infection or disease was spread.

WHAT ARE SHARPS USED FOR?

People use sharps to treat many types of medical conditions in the home, and the number of conditions treated at home with injectable medicines continues to rise. Self-injectors may use lancets and/or needles and syringes to deliver medicine for conditions such as:

- Allergies
- Arthritis
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Hepatitis
- HIV/AIDS
- Infertility
- Migraines
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Osteoporosis
- Psoriasis

DISPOSAL METHODS

First, contact your solid waste agency or pharmacy for local collection programs and recommended disposal methods. Other disposal options include:

MAIL-BACK PROGRAMS

These programs allow home sharps users to mail their used sharps to a licensed disposal facility. This is a safe and viable disposal option for every community. For a list of providers, visit the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal at www.safeneedledisposal.org.

DROP-OFF COLLECTION SITES AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMS:

Some drop-off collection and exchange programs have been established for household sharps. These sites may include hospitals, health clinics, community organizations, or police and fire stations. Follow instructions for sharps storage and disposal. DO NOT bring used needles and syringes to any facility if they are unable to accept them. Visit www.earth911.org, click on the "Hazardous" tab and then click the "Medical Sharps" link for more information or to locate a collection site.

CONTAIN AND LABEL:

In Iowa, it is currently legal to place used sharps in a lidded, rigid container, into the garbage; however this method is highly discouraged due to the health risk posed to the public. If no other disposal option is available, place used sharps in a red sharps container or in a lidded, rigid container such as a bleach bottle or detergent bottle and follow these instructions:

- Label the empty detergent container "DO NOT RECYCLE: HOUSEHOLD SHARPS"
- Put used needles in point-first into the container
- Dispose of container when it is half-full of sharps
- Keep container capped to prevent spills

REMEMBER: NEVER PLACE LOOSE NEEDLES AND SYRINGES IN THE TRASH!

PROPER DISPOSAL OF HOUSEHOLD SHARPS IS ESSENTIAL TO PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH