

United States
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Solid Waste and Emergency Response (5305W)



Disposal Tips for Home Health Care





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New Information About Disposing of Medical Sharps

The Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal, comprised of medical, government and waste association and private sector companies, is working with the Environmental Protection Agency to evaluate and promote alternative disposal methods for used needles and other medical sharps.

Improper management of discarded needles and other sharps can pose a health risk to the public and waste workers. For example, discarded needles may expose waste workers to potential needle stick injuries and potential infection when containers break open inside garbage trucks or needles are mistakenly sent to recycling facilities. Janitors and housekeepers also risk injury if loose sharps poke through plastic garbage bags. Used needles can transmit serious diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis.

The Coalition has identified several types of safe disposal programs for self-injectors. Instead of placing sharps in the trash, self-injectors are encouraged to use any of these alternative disposal methods:

- **Drop Box or Supervised Collection Sites**

Sharps users can take their own sharps containers filled with used needles to appropriate collections sites: doctors' offices, hospitals, pharmacies, health departments, or fire stations. Services are free or have a nominal fee. Check with your pharmacist or other health care provider for availability in your area.

- **Mail-back Programs**

Sharps users place their used sharps in special containers and return the container by mail to a collection site for proper disposal. This service usually requires a fee. Fees vary, depending on the size of the container. Check with your health care provider, pharmacist, yellow pages, or search the Internet using keywords “sharps mail back.”

- **Syringe Exchange Programs (SEP)**

Sharps users can safely exchange used needles for new needles. Contact the North American Syringe Exchange Network at 253-272-4857 or online at www.nasen.org.

- **At-home Needle Destruction Devices**

Several manufacturers offer products that allow you to destroy used needles at home. These devices sever, burn, or melt the needle, rendering it safe for disposal. Check with your pharmacist or search the internet using keywords “sharps disposal devices.” The prices of these devices vary according to product type and manufacturer.

For More Information:

- Call your local solid waste department or public health department to determine the correct disposal method for your area.
- Ask your health care provider or local pharmacist if they offer disposal, or if they know of safe disposal programs in the area.
- Contact the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal at 1-800-643-1643 Ask about the availability of safe disposal programs in your area or for information on setting up a community disposal program. Visit www.epa.gov/epaoswer/other/medical. This website also offers a list of all state health and solid waste/sanitation department contacts.

Safer Practices

Millions of households produce medical waste

Every year, Americans use over one billion sharp objects in their homes to administer health care. These “sharps” include lancets, needles, and syringes. If they are not disposed of in puncture-resistant containers, they can injure trash handlers; can increase the risk of infection if they come in contact with contaminated materials such as bandages, dressings, and surgical gloves; and can pollute the environment.

We need your help

You play an important role in safe practices associated with health care at home. Through this brochure, we are asking your help to safely dispose of sharps and other contaminated medical waste, such as bandages and soiled disposable sheets. We urge all home health care patients to read and follow the disposal tips contained in this brochure and handout.

You should also urge patients to explore sharps collections programs that may be available in their community. In some municipalities, for example, pharmacies and hospitals have programs in place to collect and manage used residential sharps.



Patient handouts

Multiple copies of the attached handout are available for distribution by health-care providers and product suppliers. Please complete the attached form, and return it to EPA at the address indicated. For more information on the federal medical waste program, call the Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA) Hotline at 800 424-9346 or TDD 800 553-7672. In the Washington, DC metropolitan area, the number is 703 412-9810 or TDD 703 412-3323. The RCRA Hotline operates weekdays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., eastern time.



Detach here

Order Form

Please send me _____ copies of the health-care professional brochure
Disposal Tips for Home Health Care: Educating Patients
(EPA530-F-98-025a)

Please send me _____ copies of the patient flyer
Disposal Tips for Home Health Care
(EPA530-F-98-025b)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Return Address

Place
Stamp
Here

RCRA Docket (5305W)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, SW
Washington, DC 20460



Disposal Tips for Home Health Care

You can help prevent injury, illness, and pollution by following some simple steps when you dispose of the sharp objects and contaminated materials you use in administering health care in your home.

You should place:

- Needles
- Syringes
- Lancets
- Other sharp objects

in a hard-plastic or metal container with a screw-on or tightly secured lid.



Many containers found in the household will do, or you may purchase containers specifically designed for the disposal of medical waste sharps. Before discarding a container, be sure to reinforce the lid with heavy-duty tape. **Do not put sharp objects in any container you plan to recycle or return to a store, and do not use glass or clear plastic containers** (see additional information below). Finally, make sure that you keep all containers with sharp objects out of the reach of children and pets.

We also recommend that:

- Soiled bandages
- Disposable sheets
- Medical gloves

be placed in securely fastened plastic bags before you put them in the garbage can with your other trash.



Preventing Injury and Pollution

Containers with sharps are not recyclable

EPA promotes all recycling activities, and therefore encourages you to discard medical waste sharps in sturdy, nonrecyclable containers, when possible. If a recyclable container is used to dispose of medical waste sharps, make sure that you don't mix the container with other materials to be recycled. Since the sharps impair a container's recyclability, a container holding your medical waste sharps properly belongs with the regular household trash. You may even want to label the container, "**NOT FOR RECYCLING.**" In addition, make sure your sharps container is made of nonbreakable material and has a lid that can be securely closed. These steps go a long way toward protecting workers and others from possible injury. (Although disposing of recyclable containers removes them from the recycling stream, the expected impact is minimal.)

Local Programs

Your state or community environmental programs may have other requirements or suggestions for disposing of your medical waste. You should contact them for any information you may need.



For additional copies of these disposal tips, please call the RCRA Hotline at 800 424-9346 or TDD 800 553-7672. In the Washington, DC metropolitan area, the number is 703 412-9810 or TDD 703 412-3323. The RCRA Hotline operates weekdays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., eastern time.



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