

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What does the term 'sharps' mean?

Sharps is the term used to describe any item that is capable of puncturing the skin such as syringes, needles, lancets, broken glass with blood on it, scalpels, etc. Because these '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 all kinds of medical conditions in the home, and the number of conditions treated at home with injectable medicines continues to rise. Sharps users may use lancets and/or needles and syringes to deliver medicine for conditions such as:

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

### If someone is self-injecting 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 dirty needles, the fear factor is 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.

## Learn More About Sharps...

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Provides links to state Web sites to learn more about public health laws and regulations affecting community syringe disposal options.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/needledisposal/az/index.htm>

### Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal:

Home needle destruction devices sever, melt, or burn the needle. For a list of vendors visit [www.safeneedledisposal.org](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.  
[www.earth911.org](http://www.earth911.org)

### Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

Learn more about safe community needle disposal at [www.epa.gov/epaoswer/other/medical/](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/other/medical/)



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**HANDLE  
WITH CARE**

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.

## Safe Disposal Options -

### Protect Yourself, Protect Others

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued new recommendations on disposal of used syringes generated at home. These new recommendations discourage users from throwing their used needles in the garbage. They encourage disposal of used needles through other means such as:

- ⇒ Community drop-off programs
- ⇒ Household hazardous waste facilities
- ⇒ Sharps mail-back programs
- ⇒ At-home needle destruction devices

Needle-stick injuries are a preventable health risk and specific actions can be taken to protect yourself and others.

The EPA has identified several types of safe and convenient 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-Off Collection Sites

Sharps users can take their filled sharps container to appropriate collection sites such as doctors' offices, hospitals, health clinics, pharmacies, health departments, community organizations, police and fire stations and medical waste facilities. These programs often give self-injectors the option of continuing to use empty household containers to collect sharps but prevent the sharps from entering the household waste stream. **Some of these programs may not be available in your community, so check first with any potential drop-off site.**

## Household Hazardous Waste Collection Sites

Self-injectors can place their used sharps in a special sharps container or, in some cases, an approved household container, take them to municipal household hazardous waste collection sites or events, and place them in the sharps collection bins. **Sharps might not be accepted at some collection sites, so check before going.**

## Mail-back Programs

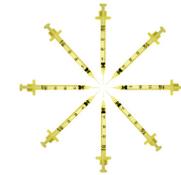
Used sharps are placed in special containers which are mailed (in accordance with U.S. Postal Service requirements) to a collection site for proper disposal. Mail-back programs are available for individual use by sharps users, and can also serve as a disposal method for community collection sites.

These programs work especially well for rural communities, facilities that don't already have a medical waste pick-up service (e.g., school systems, retail outlets, sporting arenas, casinos), and individuals who wish to

protect their privacy. **This service usually requires a fee. Fees can vary, depending on the size of the container.**

## At-home Needle Destruction Devices

Several manufacturers offer a variety of products that allow you to destroy used needles at home. These devices sever, burn, or melt the needle and allow the sharps user to discard the syringe or plunger in the garbage. These devices can reduce or eliminate the danger of sharps entering the waste stream. **The prices of these devices vary according to product type and manufacturer.**



It has been a common practice to dispose of sharps in a household plastic container or coffee can, secure the lid, write "do not recycle" on the outside, and put it in the household trash. Unfortunately that method has not effectively taken sharps out of the waste stream. Even when needles are contained in a coffee can, bleach bottle or other plastic container, these sharps containers are often crushed during processing, releasing the needles, syringes, and lancets into the waste stream and putting sanitation workers at risk. Although this practice is not illegal, it is no longer recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency.