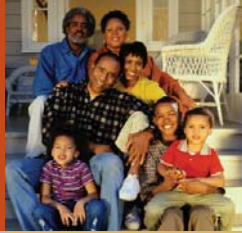
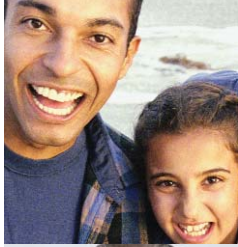
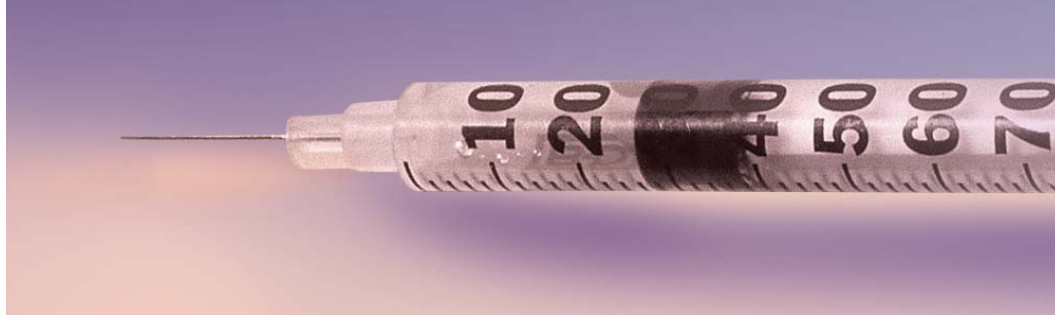


Community Options for Safe Needle Disposal





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.

Sharps disposal by self-injectors is not typically regulated, and self-injectors do not always know the safest disposal methods. This situation could lead to haphazard disposal habits and increased community exposure to sharps. People at the greatest risk of being stuck by used sharps include sanitation and sewage treatment workers, janitors and housekeepers, and children.

Due to the hazards that unsafe disposal practices present, many states and municipalities are choosing to offer safe, convenient disposal options to sharps users.

What are the dangers of used sharps?

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



Loose needles at a municipal solid waste location.

WHAT ARE SHARPS USED FOR?

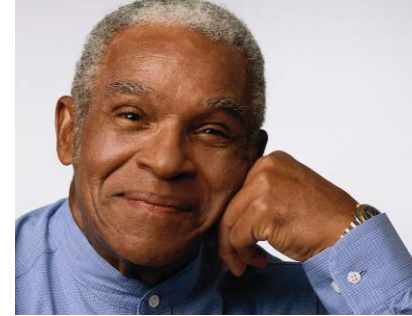
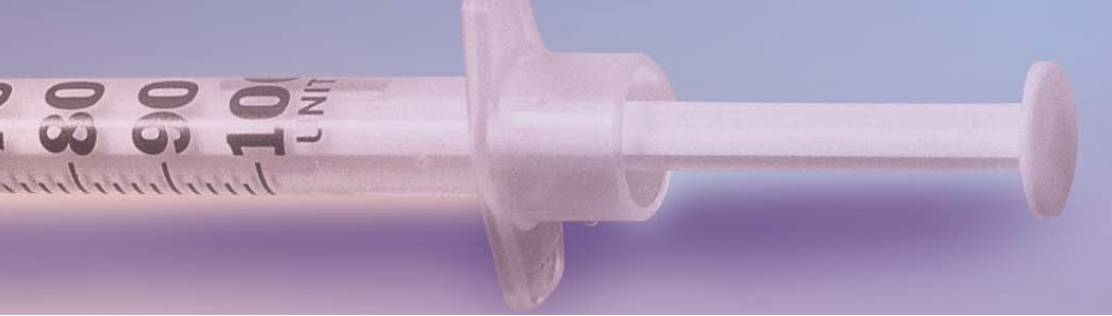
People use sharps to treat all sorts of medical conditions in the home, and the number of conditions treated at home with injectable medicines continues to rise. Sharps users may use lancets and/or needles and syringes to deliver medicine for conditions such as:

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

during collection rounds, 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 also at risk for needle-stick injuries when sharps are disposed improperly at home or in public settings.

People exposed to sharps face not only the risk of a painful stick, but also the risk of contracting a life-altering disease such as HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis B or C. All needle-stick injuries are treated as if the needle were infected with 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. Some diseases can take a long time to appear on test results, leading to months of testing and apprehension.

Needle-stick injuries are a preventable health risk, and states and municipalities can take specific actions to protect their residents from this risk.



Safe Disposal Options

- ◆ **Drop-off collection sites:** Sharps users can take their filled sharps container to appropriate collection sites, which may include 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.
- ◆ **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, and place them in the sharps collection bins. These sites also commonly accept hazardous materials such as household cleaners, paints, and motor oil.
- ◆ **Residential special waste pickup services:** Self-injectors can place their used sharps in a special container, similar to a recycling container, and put it outside their home for collection by trained special waste handlers. Some programs require customers to call for pickup, while others offer regular pickup schedules.
- ◆ **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, communities that don't already have a medical waste pickup service (e.g., school systems, retail outlets, sporting arenas, casinos), and individuals who wish to protect their privacy.

- ◆ **Syringe exchange programs:** Sharps users can exchange their used needles for new needles. Exchange programs are usually operated by community organizations, which properly dispose of the used needles collected at exchange sites.
- ◆ **Home needle destruction devices:** A variety of products are available that clip, melt, or burn the needle and allow the sharps user to throw the syringe or plunger in the garbage. These devices can reduce or eliminate the danger of sharps entering the waste stream.



A household hazardous waste disposal center in San Bernardino, California.



Where can I find more information

A variety of resources are available for states and municipalities that want to improve the safe options for sharps disposal available to their residents.

Program Assistance Information

You can contact the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal by phone at (800) 643-1643 or online at <www.safeneedledisposal.org>. The coalition can assist in implementing a safe sharps disposal program in your area.

If your state or municipality wishes to establish a syringe exchange program, contact the North American Syringe Exchange Network at (253) 272-4857 or <www.nasen.org>.

Government Resources

The Internet is a valuable resource for researching the steps other states and municipalities have taken to inform their citizens and ensure safe sharps disposal.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Web site, located at <www.cdc.gov/needledisposal>, provides state-by-state information on sharps-related laws and regulations, safe community disposal programs, published guidance, and contact information.

Some states that use the Internet to publicize their sharps disposal programs and regulations include:

◆ California

www.ciwmb.ca.gov/wpie/healthcare/ppcp.htm

◆ Florida

www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/facility/biomed/hmesharp.htm

◆ New Hampshire

www.des.nh.gov/factsheets/sw/sw-31.htm

◆ New Jersey

www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/phss/syringe.pdf



Information about sharps disposal?

◆ New York

www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/hiv aids/esap/housesharps.htm
www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/hiv aids/esap/regover.htm#emergency

◆ Rhode Island

www.health.ri.gov/environment/risk/medwaste.htm

◆ Washington (Seattle/King County)

www.metrokc.gov/health/apu/resources/disposal.htm

◆ Wisconsin

www.dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/medinf

Mail-back Program Providers

Mail-back programs, which allow home sharps users to mail their used sharps to a licensed disposal facility, present a safe, viable sharps disposal option for every community. For a list of providers, visit the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal Web site at www.safeneedledisposal.org.

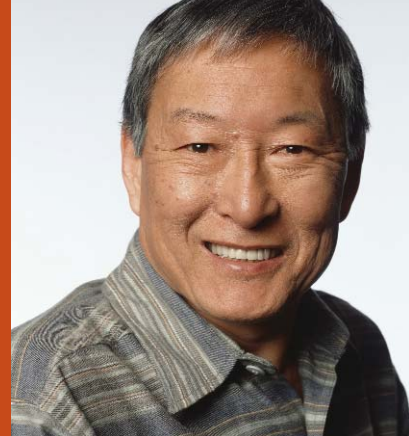
Home Needle Destruction Devices

These devices sever, melt, or burn the needle, allowing sharps users to throw the syringe or plunger in the garbage. For a list of vendors, visit the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal Web site at www.safeneedledisposal.org.

Other Relevant Information

To learn more about regulations concerning medical waste disposal, consult EPA's Medical Waste Web site at www.epa.gov/epaoswer/other/medical.

The Household Hazardous Waste section of the Earth 911 Web site, www.earth911.org, allows users to enter their ZIP code and view a list of sharps disposal programs available in their area.



Programs in Action

As home use of injectable medicines continues to rise, communities throughout the United States are implementing safe disposal programs to reduce the public health hazards that used sharps present when improperly disposed. Currently, hundreds of collection or disposal programs exist across the country. Active states include: California, Florida, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Drop-Off Collection:

Low-cost Solution Protects Employees Houston, Texas



To better serve sharps users while guarding against needle-stick injuries, the Houston Airport System (HAS) installed wall-mounted sharps disposal units in

all 69 of its public and employee restrooms at a cost of \$300 per year and a startup cost of \$2,000. HAS financed the disposal program. **For more information on the program, contact Bush Intercontinental Airport at (281) 230-3017.**

Drop-Off Collection:

Statewide Partnership Reduces Needle Sticks Rhode Island

Rhode Island formed a state coalition, headed by the Diabetes Foundation of Rhode Island, to address an increase in needle-stick injuries at the state's landfill and materials recovery facility. The program placed sharps disposal kiosks at 42 locations statewide, including pharmacies, doctors' offices, and fire and police stations. Home sharps users bring their filled sharps containers for disposal and receive a new

sharps container in return, all free of charge. The annual average cost to maintain a kiosk is \$1,500, which includes the cost of the sharps containers provided to users, literature, kiosk maintenance, and proper waste disposal. In addition, the program now assists other states in designing similar programs and identifying potential funding sources. **For more information, contact the Diabetes Foundation of Rhode Island at (401) 725-7800.**



Drop-Off Collection:

24-Hour Low-cost Community Solution Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin

Riverview Hospital in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, began its own sharps disposal program. *Sharps Smart* was implemented to help sharps users follow the state law



that keeps used sharps out of the waste stream. The program allows self-injectors to bring their filled commercial sharps containers or sealed household containers to the hospital, where users mark the container with an orange biohazard label and drop it into the *Sharps Smart* cart for free disposal. Maintaining the program costs about \$2,500 per year. The collection cart, located in the entryway of the hospital, is always available to residents.

For more information, contact Riverview Hospital Environmental Services at (715) 421-7443.

The mention of any company, product, or process in this publication does not constitute or imply endorsement by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Household Hazardous Waste Collection:

State-funded Collection Program San Bernardino, California



When the city of San Bernardino's hospital stopped accepting used sharps from community members, sanitation workers began to notice

an increase in needle sightings—despite a city ordinance that prohibits disposing of used sharps in household trash. The city implemented a sharps disposal program that allows sharps users to drop off sharps containers at the city's existing household hazardous waste collection facilities. The program is successful largely due to the fact that it is convenient and free. The California Integrated Waste Management Board funded the program for the first two years at an annual cost of \$5,900. The city of San Bernardino now funds it at an annual cost of \$6,000. To publicize the program, the city offers a point-of-sale display to pharmacies and includes information about the program in the city newsletter.

To learn more, contact the city of San Bernardino at (909) 384-5549.

Residential Special Waste Pickup:

Door-to-Door Disposal Service Columbus, Georgia



The city of Columbus, Georgia, took a personal approach to its sharps disposal program after sanitation workers suffered needle-stick

injuries from sharps discarded in household garbage. Residents now collect their sharps in their own hard

plastic container and call the city's waste management agency when their sharps container is full. A waste supervisor is then dispatched to their home to take the container for safe disposal.

By having waste collection supervisors—who are already in the field on their regular rounds—pick up sharps from residents, Columbus has provided a safe disposal option that costs the city virtually nothing.

For more information, contact the city of Columbus at (706) 653-4161.

Mail-back Program:

Flexibility and Accessibility by Mail Alameda County, California

Some municipalities are recognizing the flexible benefits of mail-back programs and are beginning to offer them to their residents.

Restaurant chains, department stores, stadiums, and school districts are also beginning to use mail-back programs as a viable disposal option for their collected sharps. Mailback programs complement existing needle collection programs by offering disposal solutions for rural or homebound residents.



Alameda County, California, is conducting a pilot program by distributing mail-back containers free of charge to medically under-served populations. The county's large size and diverse demographics have presented problems in adopting more traditional methods of safe sharps disposal, such as drop-off sites or residential collection. By contracting with a vendor for mail-back service, Alameda hopes to reach a greater percentage of its self-injecting population—if residents have a mailbox, they have access to the service.

For more information, contact the Alameda County Sharps Coalition at (510) 532-1930.



United States
Environmental Protection Agency
5305W
Washington, DC 20460

EPA530-K-04-001
October 2004
www.epa.gov/osw