



Household Medical Sharps Management

FACT SHEET 37-034-0518

1. BACKGROUND: Normally, home-generated sharps can be discarded in household trash unless prohibited by local regulations. Before using the guidelines listed below, check with your county public works/sanitation department, health department, trash removal service, etc. to determine your local requirements. Sharps waste should never be thrown loosely in the trash or flushed down a toilet.

Sharps generated in a household may consist of hypodermic needles, syringes with needles attached, auto injectors (e.g., insulin pens), scalpel blades, and lancet-type sharps. Sharps disposed in household trash without taking proper precautions pose a potential health risk to waste collectors and workers in recycling facilities who could accidentally be stuck by them. These “needle stick” injuries can cause long-term emotional stress for the injured worker and increase their risk of exposure to infectious diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis. With proper controls in place, household waste sharps can be managed safely and economically.

2. HOUSEHOLD SHARPS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: Sharps waste generated in a household setting should be managed as follows:

- Immediately after use, place waste sharps in a rigid, puncture and leak-resistant container with a secure lid or cap. Acceptable containers include commercially-available U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved sharps containers, or heavy-duty plastic household containers with tight-fitting screw cap lids (e.g., detergent or bleach bottles). Unacceptable containers include coffee cans (lids are too easily removed), plastic bags, beverage bottles and cans, milk cartons, and see-thru containers. **DO NOT** add bleach to the container. Bleach may not completely disinfect the sharps, and could spill or injure residents and waste handlers.
- When 2/3 to 3/4 full (to avoid overfilling and protruding), the sharps container should be taped closed or tightly lidded to make re-opening difficult. Do not reopen closed, full sharps containers.
- Label sharps containers destined for disposal with words such as “**Waste Household Sharps**”, “**Waste Household Syringes**”, or “**Waste Household Needles**”. If a recyclable household container is used to dispose of medical sharps waste, ensure the container is labeled “**Not for Recycle**” to avoid inadvertent mingling with recyclables or other wastes (sharps are not recyclable).
- For additional safety of the trash handlers, try to place the sharps container in the center of the trash bag and surround it with other trash. Discard sharps containers in residential trash containers only. Placement of sharps containers in a dumpster on an Army installation (not in the housing area) will draw unnecessary regulatory scrutiny for the installation medical treatment facility (MTF).
- Make sure sharps containers are kept out of reach of children and pets, and are secure when not in use.
- Do not manipulate sharps by shearing, clipping, bending, recapping, or breaking needles, as this increases the risk of needle-stick injury. If you do choose to do this at home, buy a device that clips, catches, and contains the needle. Do not use scissors to clip off needles as you could be hurt by the flying needle or it could become lost.

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3. ADDITIONAL SHARPS DISPOSAL PROGRAMS: As an alternative to disposing of sharps as household trash, other disposal services and programs may be available locally. These include: community-sponsored special waste haulers who collect sharps containers directly from residents; drop-off collection sites; commercial “mail-back” container programs; and community-based syringe exchange programs (SEPs). Contact your local municipality or state officials to determine if any of these programs are available in your area. These options may be free or have a fee associated with their use. As a final alternative, home use needle destruction devices are also commercially available.

- Residential Special Waste Pick-up Service: Sharps generated in a residential setting should be placed in a program designated “sharps” container, and then set outside for pick-up by trained special waste handlers. Some programs require a call for pick-up, others have regularly scheduled pick-ups.
- Sharps Drop-off Collection Sites: Residential sharps users can take their sealed sharps containers to designated collection site. These may include, doctor’s offices, pharmacies, hospitals, health departments, fire stations, medical waste facilities, and household hazardous waste drop-off sites. Note: unless an Army MTF has an established program, household generated sharps (from both on and off of the installation) cannot be taken to the MTF for disposal.
- Mail-back Programs: Allows specially approved sharps containers to be mailed to a collection company for disposal. This service usually requires a fee, and includes the sharps container and mail-back packaging (return postage is normally included). The manufacturer’s instructions included with the container need to be followed to ensure safety during handling and shipping.
- Syringe Exchange Programs: Also known as syringe services programs (SSPs), needle exchange programs (NEPs) and needle-syringe programs (NSPs), are community-based programs that provide access to sterile needles and syringes free of cost, facilitate safe disposal of used needles and syringes, and offer safer injection education.
- Home Needle Destruction: Products are commercially available for “at-home” burning, melting, or clipping off the needle of a syringe. Once the needle is destroyed, the syringe can be disposed of in the regular trash. If using this method, ensure the destruction device is approved by the FDA.

4. INTERNET SOURCES FOR SHARPS DISPOSAL INFORMATION: For additional information on management and disposal of used sharps, the following organizations may be contacted.

- SafeNeedleDisposal.org (1-800-643-1643): www.safeneedledisposal.org Information on the availability of safe disposal programs by State and local area.
- American Diabetes Association (1-800-342-2383): www.diabetes.org/ Search this website for “Insulin Storage and Syringe Safety Information”.
- U.S. EPA: <https://www.epa.gov/rcra/medical-waste> Provides information on community options for safe needle disposal and safe options for home needle disposal.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/bbp/disposal.html> Provides additional resources for safe community needle disposal.
- U.S. Food & Drug Administration: <https://www.fda.gov/MedicalDevices/ProductsandMedicalProcedures/HomeHealthandConsumer/ConsumerProducts/Sharps/ucm20025647.htm> Includes information on safely using sharps (needles and syringes) at home, at work and on travel; sharps disposal containers; and the best way to get rid of used needles and other sharps.
- North American Syringe Exchange Program (1-253-272-4857): <https://nasen.org/> Information on locations of syringe exchange programs.