

This fact sheet provides guidance to households on the safe disposal of needles, syringes, and lancets. These items are also called “sharps”. Improper disposal of sharps can pose a risk to the public, sanitation and sewage treatment workers, janitors, housekeepers, and children. Used needles can transmit serious diseases, such as HIV or hepatitis. Instead of placing sharps directly in the trash, please consider any one of the following safe disposal methods:

### **Drop Box or Supervised Collection Sites**

Some communities offer collection sites that accept used needles. Check with your pharmacist or health care provider for availability in your area.

### **Household Hazardous Waste Collection Events**

Some communities, waste districts, or landfills regularly hold collection events for typical household hazardous wastes from local area residents. Check with your city or county waste management offices to learn about event timing and whether sharps are handled at those events (like in Missoula or Bozeman). Your questions may encourage them to take sharps at the event.

### **Mail-Back Programs**

Used sharps are placed in special containers and are then mailed to a collection site for proper disposal. You pay for this service and the price depends upon the size of the container that you pick. When contacting a mail-back service company, be sure to ask them if their service is approved by the U.S. Postal Service or a similar parcel/postal service (e.g., UPS, FedEx, etc.).

For a list of mail-back service companies, contact Safe Needle Disposal at 1-800-643-1643, available Monday through Friday, 9am - 5pm EST, or visit their website at: [www.safeneedledisposal.org](http://www.safeneedledisposal.org)

### **Syringe Exchange Programs**

These programs will exchange your used needles for new needles. Contact the North American Syringe Exchange Program at (253) 272-4857 or visit their website at: [www.nasen.org](http://www.nasen.org)

### **At-Home Needle Destruction Devices**

Several manufacturers offer products for sale that allow you to destroy used needles at home. These devices sever, burn, or melt the needle – making it safe for disposal. Prices vary depending on the product. Ask your pharmacist or search the internet using the keywords “sharps disposal devices”.

### **Other recommendations:**

If none of the above options are available in your area, you may put the used sharps into an empty, puncture and leak-proof container with a tight lid (e.g. a liquid laundry detergent or bleach container). To do so safely, please consider the following:

- Don't use a clear container, and mark or label the container with the word “**SHARPS**” in 1-inch letters.
- Don't fill the container too full.
- Add household bleach to sterilize the sharps (1 tablespoon to 1 gallon of water).
- Seal the container with a tight-fitting lid and secure it with a heavy-duty tape, such as duct tape..
- Keep your container clearly segregated from your regular garbage for transport to the local solid waste landfill. Landfill personnel must be able to identify your container at the landfill entrance. Notify your local garbage hauler that you have sharps for disposal to determine if there are any additional handling requirements.

**Other resources:** [Community Options for Safe Needle Disposal \(PDF\)](#) (8 pp, 590K, [about PDF](#)); [Protect Yourself, Protect Others: Safe Options for Home Needle Disposal \(PDF\)](#) (2 pp, 257K, [about PDF](#)) |