

Household Needle Waste

The problem with household generated needle waste

Each year, millions of Americans use needles, syringes, and lancets to treat medical conditions at home. These needles, syringes, and lancets – also called sharps - are important for the management of medical conditions in home such as allergies, diabetes, and osteoporosis, but disposing of them after they are used can be a challenge.



If used sharps are placed loosely in the household garbage, flushed down the toilet, or disposed of haphazardly in public places, they can pose a risk to the community. This risk may be greatest for family members of in-home sharps users including children and pets. Municipal solid waste workers are also at risk of being stuck by loosely placed sharps, during trash pickups. People exposed to used sharps are at risk of contracting potentially life-altering diseases including HIV/AIDS or hepatitis C.

Household generated needles disposal and safe use tips

Disposal of sharps from the home is not currently regulated in Colorado, allowing the in-home sharps user to place them directly into the household garbage. Although this method is allowable, it is recommended that it be used only as a last option if other, safer methods are not feasible. Regardless of the disposal method used, safe handling procedures should always be implemented by the in-home sharps user.

Safe Handling Tips:

Place sharps into a designated container immediately after use.

Use strong, puncture proof containers (metal or plastic) with screw-on or other tightly fitting lids. Examples may include empty laundry detergent bottles, empty bleach bottles, or other heavy plastic jugs. Specially designed sharps containers may also be available from your doctor or pharmacist. *Don't use glass or lightweight plastic containers.*



Avoid unnecessary additional handling of sharps. Do not bend, break, or remove needles from syringes unless using a commercially available sharps destruction device. Do not recap needles and do not reuse needles.



Eleven offices along the front range serving the residents of Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties Administration Office:
6162 S. Willow Drive, Suite 100
Greenwood Village, Colorado 80111 Telephone: 720-200-1592
Fax: 720-741-4021 Website: www.tchd.org

After sharps are safely contained, using one of the following safe disposal options is strongly recommended:

Safe Disposal Tips:

Find out if the pharmacy or company where your sharps are purchased provides a disposal alternative. Some may offer programs that accept used sharps for free or a small fee.

Ask your doctor or hospital if they offer disposal options. Some hospitals may accept sharps generated by individuals managing medical conditions at home.

Look into utilizing the services of a commercially available mail-in program or medical waste disposal company. There are many companies that offer sharps disposal services including*:

- Colorado Medical Waste Inc. - <http://www.coloradomedicalwaste.com/> ; (303) 794-5716
- Waste Management – www.wastemd.com ; 1-877-927-8363
- Stericycle – www.stericycle.com ; 1-866-783-7422
- Sharps Compliance Corporation – www.sharpsinc.com ; 1-800-772-5657
- Medasend Mailback, Inc. – www.medasend.com ; 1-800-200-3581

* This list is not exhaustive or complete; please check the yellow pages listing under “Waste Disposal – Medical” or Internet resources below for the most current information. Tri-County Health Department does not recommend or endorse any specific companies.

As a last option, household generated sharps waste may be disposed of in your trash. In order to ensure safe disposal of sharps in the garbage, follow the safe handling tips as listed above and ensure the following extra precautions are taken:

- Place the tight fitting lid on the container.
- Seal lid with heavy duty tape such as duct tape.
- Place container directly in the trash as close to your garbage pickup time as possible.
Never dispose of sharps containers in the recycling bin

Additional Resources:

- Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) call (720) 200-1592
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), Hazardous Materials and Waste Management Division <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/household-needles-and-sharps> | (303) 692-3320
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) <http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/industrial/medical/disposal.htm>



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