

Recommendations for Disposal of Medical Waste at Home

Americans use more than one billion sharp objects, as well as other materials in their homes annually for health care purposes. If these medical “sharps” (e.g. lancets, needles and syringes) are not disposed of properly, they could injure family members, trash handlers or others who might come in contact with them.

You can easily prevent injury, illness, and pollution by using these simple procedures when disposing of sharp objects and other contaminated materials in your home:

Place sharp objects in a hard-plastic or metal container with a tight screw-on lid, including:

- Needles,
- Syringes
- Lancets
- Other sharp objects

When you can, put sharp items in sturdy, non-recyclable containers. You may already have containers in your home that will do, or you can obtain commercially produced containers specially designed for this purpose from a medical supply store or local pharmacist. Some brands are advertised as tamper proof and very sturdy and can be disposed of in regular trash. However, before you throw a non-commercial container away, be sure to wrap the lid with heavy-duty tape (e.g. Duct Tape).

Do NOT use glass or clear plastic containers, or put sharp objects in any container you are going to recycle or return to a store. If a recyclable container is all you have, make sure that you don’t mix this container with other things to be recycled, and write, **“NOT FOR RECYCLING”** on the container. Since these containers are much more difficult to recycle, you can put them in your regular household trash. Make sure to keep all containers with sharp objects out of the reach of children and pets.

In addition, home needle destruction devices are available that allow you to safely destroy needles in your home by burning, melting or cutting off the needle. Finally, there are special waste disposal companies who will help you dispose of these materials for a fee. For example, Stericycle, Inc. (800-355-8773) has both site pick-up and mail-back programs available. For more information about companies offering home needle destruction devices or mail-back medical sharps services, contact the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal at (800) 643-1643 (www.safeneedledisposal.org). put other contaminated material in tightly closed plastic bags before putting them in the garbage can with your regular trash, including:

- Soiled bandages
- Disposable sheets
- Medical gloves