

# Disposal of Home Generated Medical Sharps the Right Way!

## Disposal of Medical Waste



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 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. Home-generated sharps must be properly managed to prevent injury by unintentional sticks or disease transmission. People at the greatest risk of being stuck by used sharps include sanitation and sewage treatment workers, janitors and housekeepers, and children.

### Dangers

Many self-injectors are unaware of the safe disposal methods and simply throw used needles in the trash or flush them down the toilet. Used sharps left loose among other waste can hurt:

- Sanitation workers during collection rounds
- At sorting and recycling facilities
- At landfills

Sharps can become lodged in equipment, forcing workers to remove them by hand. People exposed to sharps face not only the risk of a painful stick, but also the risk of contracting a disease such as HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis B or C. All needle-stick injuries are treated as if the needle carries 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.

Individuals who use syringes at home are responsible for ensuring that their used syringes are stored in a way that does not cause health hazards.

Each county in Iowa has procedures to handle sharps and keep their workers safe.

## Your Part

### Disposal Methods

In Iowa, it is currently legal to place used sharps in a lidded, rigid container, into the garbage:

- Label container  
"Do Not Recycle:  
Household Sharps"
- Put sharps in point-first.
- Containers more than half-full should be disposed of
- Store sharps in closed container with the cap screwed on.



Do not store used sharps in:

- glass bottles
- soda bottles
- milk jugs
- aluminum cans
- coffee cans



### Mail-Back Program

These programs allow home sharps users to mail their used sharps to a licensed disposal facility. This is a safe and viable disposal option for every community. For a list of providers, visit the Coalitions for safe Community Needle Disposal at [www.safeneedledisposal.org](http://www.safeneedledisposal.org).

**REMEMBER: NEVER PLACE  
LOOSE NEEDLES IN THE TRASH!**

## For more information

Iowa Department of Natural Resources  
502 E. 9th St. Des Moines, IA 50319  
(515) 281-5918  
[www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov)

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