

## Safe Sharps Disposal

### **What do you mean by ‘sharps’?**

There are many individuals with health conditions such as diabetes, allergies or arthritis who manage their care at home and use syringes. For example, people with diabetes use syringes to inject their own insulin and lancets, or finger stick devices that use short blades to test their blood glucose or sugar every day. Other conditions that use sharps in their care management include osteoporosis, multiple sclerosis, hepatitis B and HIV.

Sharps also refer to syringes and needles used by substance abuse injection drug users.

Additional sharps include auto injectors (epi-pens for bee stings) and needles on infusion sets for antibiotics or home dialysis.

The FDA estimates 9 million Americans use needles or other sharps to manage their own and their pet’s medical conditions in the home.

### **Why is it a problem to throw sharps in the trash?**

Improperly disposed sharps can injure people or pets by causing needle sticks, especially to the hands and feet or to your pet’s nose and paws.

Throwing sharps in open trash containers in public restrooms and hotel rooms expose sanitation workers and housekeepers to risk.

Improperly disposed sharps in recycle bins expose workers to undue risk when handling.

Glass bottles can break, soda bottles and milk cartons can be punctured and lids can easily come off coffee cans exposing needles to your family, pets and sanitation workers.

### **What are the dangers?**

Anytime there is blood-to-blood contact with infected blood or body fluids, there is a slight potential for transmission. The risk of catching a serious infection as a result of an accidental needle stick injury is very low, because HIV, Hepatitis B and C viruses do not survive for long outside of the body. Most community needle stick injuries involve needles that have been discarded for some time.

Although the risk of disease transmission may be low, if an exposure occurs the anxiety and concern of the person or the parent is high and there is considerable time and cost to follow-up with your medical provider if exposed.

## **How can I safely dispose of sharps?**

1. The best local option for safe disposal is to use hospitals and nursing homes in your area who accept home-generated sharps as a free community service. Call them to get specific information about dates and times and whether they require a bio-hazard sharps container or accept a substitute.
2. Another free option is the Southern Tier Aids Program, 501 South Meadow Street who operate the syringe exchange program, they also accept community generated sharps, call for details.
3. Paid options include sharps mail-back programs, such as the BD Company that use pre-paid special mailers at a relatively low cost.
4. And lastly, although it is not the recommended method, sharps can legally be disposed of in the household trash with the following caveats. Use a sturdy, leak resistant, and puncture proof empty detergent bottle or bottle made of rigid plastic, mark it to say 'contains sharps' 'do not recycle', cap it and tape the cap as an extra precaution. But, it is important to note, private refuse haulers may have restrictions.

## **Absolutes**

- Never dispose bio-hazard marked containers in the trash.
- Never use glass bottles, soda bottles, milk jugs or coffee cans to store and dispose of sharps.
- Never dispose of sharps in the toilet.
- Never attempt to take the remove the needle from a syringe from someone other than yourself. And if it is your own sharp only remove the needle if you have a device specifically designed for this purpose.
- Never overfill sharps containers.
- Always keep sharps containers out of reach of children and pets.
- If you use sharps, be prepared if away from home and carry a portable sharps disposal container. Public places such as airports are beginning to post lockable sharps containers. In time hopefully more public restrooms will install these lockable boxes for their customers and for the safety of their workers.

## **What to Do If You Are Accidentally Stuck By a Used Needle or Other Sharp**

If you are injured by a sharp from an unknown source wash the area as soon as possible with soap and water or hand sanitizer and call your medical provider immediately to determine the best response.

## **How do I dispose of a needle or syringe found in the community?**

If you find a sharp, obtain an empty detergent bottle that will safely hold the sharp (see above for details), use a barrier to protect yourself such as plastic gloves or tongs and place the sharp needle side down into the container. Do not attempt to take the needle off. Cap the bottle; mark the container, tape the cap and then it can be transported safely. The container may be

placed in the household trash or be taken to the Southern Tier Aids Program at 501 South Meadow Street. Inform local law enforcement that you've found the sharp(s) so they are aware of the problem. Lab testing is not done on sharps found in the community.

### **Where can I find more information?**

Information on the location and hours of operation for the Cayuga Medical Center and area skilled nursing home sharps collections are posted on the Tompkins County Health Department website – 'Look in the A to Z index under 'S' for Sharps Disposal – [www.tompkins-co.org/health/dch/sharps-collect.htm](http://www.tompkins-co.org/health/dch/sharps-collect.htm)

There are also NYS-Approved Syringe Exchange Programs (SEP) that offer syringe collection services to the community. The Ithaca Syringe Exchange Program is provided by the Southern Tier Aids Program located at 501 S. Meadow Street, 272-4098. A listing of other state SEPs can be found at the following link.

[www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/harm\\_reduction/needles\\_syringes/docs/sep\\_hours\\_sites.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/harm_reduction/needles_syringes/docs/sep_hours_sites.pdf)

Podcast - WHCU, 870 AM, November 28, 7:45 am with Lee Rayburn - Sigrid Connors, MS, RN - Director of Patient Services

[http://whcu870.com/episode\\_download.php?contentType=36&contentId=6137589](http://whcu870.com/episode_download.php?contentType=36&contentId=6137589)

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