



# A Guide to Syringe Disposal

**Protect Yourself,  
Protect Others,  
Safe Options  
for Home Needle  
Disposal**

## Disposing of Your Syringes

It is now illegal to dispose of syringes in the trash, or recycling bin, or composting bins.

All needles should be treated as if they carry a disease. That means that if someone gets stuck with a needle, they could get infected with a disease that may be on the needle. Therefore, they would have to get extensive medical tests and worry about whether they have caught a harmful or deadly disease. You have the power to prevent a situation like this simply by safely disposing of your used sharps. Do not place others at risk when safe alternatives are currently available.

## Why Are Needles Dangerous?

They can injure people; can spread germs (hepatitis and HIV/AIDS); damage recycling equipment; and require people to be tested for years for HIV and hepatitis, if they are stuck.

### To avoid needle sticks at home and protect garbage and recycling workers, don't do the following:

- **Don't** throw used needles, syringes, or lancets in the garbage.
- **Don't** put needles in recycling containers.
- **Don't** flush needles down the toilet.
- **Don't** put needles into used plastic milk jugs, bleach bottles, or soda bottles.

### To properly and legally dispose of needles, do the following:

- **Do** use an approved disposal container.
- **Do** find a collection center for proper disposal.



## Safe Packaging Options

The safest and recommended method to package your sharps is in an approved red sharps container. The sharps container is puncture-resistant and, once sealed, cannot spill. This container is considered full when it has been filled to three quarters of its capacity. At this point, the container should be permanently sealed and returned to a disposal location as soon as possible. At that time a new container should be obtained.

## Traveling with Needles

Don't forget, safe needle disposal is important no matter where you are—at home, at work, or on the road. Never place used needles in the trash on airplanes, in hotel rooms, or in public restrooms.

Be prepared—ask about options for safe needle disposal when you make travel reservations. If you aren't sure that needle containers will be available where you're going, be sure to buy a needle container that can hold your used needles until you can properly dispose of them.

## Options for Proper Needle Disposal

### Drop-off Collection Sites

*Some communities offer collection sites that accept used needles, often for free. These collection sites may be at:*

- local hospitals
- doctors' offices
- health clinics
- pharmacies
- health departments
- community organizations

- police and fire departments
- medical waste facilities

Don't just leave your needles at one of these places—make sure the site accepts them, and be sure to put the needles in the right place.

### Household Hazardous Waste Centers (HHW)

Many communities have a disposal site already set up that accepts "HHW" items like used oil, batteries, and paint. In some locations, these centers also accept used needles. Call to make sure the center accepts needles before you go.

### Syringe Exchange Programs

These programs let you trade your used needles for new ones. The group that runs the service will dispose of your used needles safely.

### Mail-back Service

You can buy this service, which comes with a sharps container and mail-back packaging to mail your container back once it is full. The cost of service usually depends on the size of the container you choose.

### Home Needle Destruction Devices

Several manufacturers offer products for sale that allow you to destroy needles at home by burning, melting or cutting off the needle—making it safe to then throw in the garbage. Prices vary depending on the product.

## How Can I Find More Information on Sharps Disposal?

Ask your local pharmacist or health care provider if they can dispose of your used needles, or if they know of safe disposal programs near you. Other options would be: household hazardous waste facility, or using a mail-back container.

Visit the California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) website at:

**<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/HHW/HealthCare/Collection/>** to find a disposal location. Enter your county and the database will tell you where you can dispose of the sharps.

