

Disposal options for needles and syringes

What's the problem?

Used household needles, lancets, and syringes (collectively called *sharps*) that are not properly managed can injure or spread disease to family members, waste handlers, and the public. Households can properly manage their sharps by safely storing or immediately destroying them, then ensuring proper disposal.



1. Storing used sharps safely

Use a sturdy plastic container with a screw-on lid, like an empty laundry detergent bottle.

- Clearly label it: "Do not recycle: Household sharps"
- Do not store sharps in glass bottles, aluminum cans, coffee cans, milk jugs, or plastic water or soda bottles, since these can break or be punctured.

You can also purchase a sharps container or ask your health care provider or pharmacy if they can give you one.

If you plan to dispose of your sharps through a mail-back service, choose a service first and check their instructions. Some may require use of a specific pre-purchased sharps container.

Place needles in point-first, and don't fill more than half-full.

Always keep any sharps containers out of the reach of children.



2. Immediately destroying sharps at home

Needle cutters or clippers: These devices remove the needle from syringes and store them in the cutter's case. They are often much cheaper than needle melters or grinders and can fit in a pocket.

The plastic part of the clipped syringe may be disposed in the trash (**not in the recycling!**). Once the cutter is full, it should be disposed of at a sharps collection program or via a mailback service as described in #3 on the next page.

Needle grinder or melter: Once the needle or lancet is destroyed, the remaining syringe and melted metal can be safely disposed of in the garbage (not the recycling container).



3. Disposing of household sharps

Best option

Household sharps collection sites

In Minnesota, it is up to each pharmacy, healthcare facility, city, and county to decide whether they want to collect household sharps from citizens. Many counties offer free or low-cost household sharps collection sites. Contact your county solid waste office or household hazardous waste program to find out if they collect household sharps for proper disposal. Most healthcare facilities do not accept household sharps from patients, however, a few pharmacies in Minnesota do.

Visit <http://safeneedledisposal.org/> to locate Minnesota household sharps collection sites.

- Do not bring household sharps to a *Take It to the Box* household medication dropbox at a pharmacy or law enforcement stations. www.pca.state.mn.us/living-green/managing-unwanted-medications
- Dispose of prefilled syringes, such as EpiPen™ or Narcan™ injectors, with your household sharps.
- If your sharps container does not have a tight screw-on lid, use strong tape, such as duct tape, to secure the lid and any openings.

Good option, but more expensive

Mail-back programs

You may purchase pre-paid household sharps mailers to send your sharps to a disposal facility. Check with your health care provider or pharmacist, or search online for available services.



Poor option, but allowed

In the garbage: legal, but less safe

If you cannot get to a household sharps collection site, you may legally place your labeled, closed, sharps container into your normal trash. The MPCA discourages this option for safety reasons unless disposing of household sharps at a collection site or mail-back program is not practical.

- **Never** place loose sharps into your trash or recycling.
- **Never** put sharps containers into your recycling container.

Some trash and most recyclables are hand-sorted. Loose sharps and sharps containers in recycling endangers employees.



Never put a sharps container in the recycling bin, only in the trash.

More information

For information on your local household hazardous wastes and collection programs, contact your County Solid Waste Office.

Visit the MPCA at www.pca.state.mn.us/hhw to find your local program contact information



SafeNeedleDisposal.org
Safety is the point.

To locate a household sharps collection site

in Minnesota or another state, visit safeneedledisposal.org



For general disease prevention information,

visit the Minnesota Department of Health at www.health.state.mn.us or call 651-201-5000 or 1-888-345-0823.