



Disposal of Household Generated Sharps

This guidance document is intended to provide disposal tips to homeowners who generate sharps for purposes of their own care or treatment.

What is the purpose of this guidance document?

Disposing of loose needles, lancets, and syringes (sharps) into household trash poses a risk to family members and solid waste workers who must handle the waste. Ohio law allows individuals that generate infectious sharps while providing their own care or treatment at home to dispose of sharps with their regular household trash. However, it is strongly encouraged that all sharps be packaged in a sturdy and closable container and labeled to convey its potential hazard.

What are some disposal options for sharps?

Inquire with the company or pharmacy where you purchase your medical supplies regarding disposal options. Some have programs to accept sharps containers, free or for a nominal fee, which are then treated and disposed.

There are sharps mail back programs available for a fee. These programs provide disposal supplies and return disposal packaging and return labels when you order the sharps container. Once the sharps container is full, seal the container, place it in the pre-labeled postage-paid mailing box, and drop the container in the mail. To learn more about these types of services, you may want to search the internet for “sharps mail back program.”

Landfills may accept sharps containers directly at the landfill to reduce the number of sharps in the trash and the risk to the sanitation worker. You may contact your local solid waste hauler to ask about their policy pertaining to accepting sharps containers. You may also contact your local solid waste management district to see if they collect sharps at a household hazardous waste collection event.

Some hospitals will take sharp wastes generated by an individual for purposes of their own treatment or care. Your local health department may also be aware of available sharps disposal options.

What are my alternatives to a purchased sharps container?

Use a rigid, leak-proof, puncture-resistant container with a tight-fitting lid. Common household containers that match this description include detergent bottles, bleach bottles, two-liter bottles, plastic juice containers and coffee cans (if the lid is securely taped to the can).

Glass containers are not recommended for use as sharps containers because the glass may break and spill the contents. Plastic milk jugs make poor sharps containers because the plastic used in these containers is thin and sharps easily poke through. In addition, milk jugs do not always have a tight-fitting lid.

Label any container used to dispose of sharps with the word “SHARPS” on all sides of the container in big block letters. Labeling the container will convey the potential hazard inside. Do not put your homemade sharps container in the recycle bin.

Contact Information

For additional information regarding this document, please contact the Infectious Waste Unit at 614-644-2621.