

Managing household needles and syringes



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 and properly disposing of them, or alternatively by destroying them at home using specialized devices.

1. Storing used sharps safely at home

Ask if your pharmacy, health care provider, or home medical care supplies vendor can provide you with a sharps container.

Alternatively, you can also use a sturdy plastic container with a screw-on lid, such as an empty laundry detergent bottle.

- Clearly label the container "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.
- Only loosely fill the container, then tightly cap and seal with tape.

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. Properly disposing of household sharps

Best option

Household sharps collection site

In Minnesota, it is up to each pharmacy, healthcare provider, and local government to decide whether to collect household sharps. Many counties offer free or low-cost household sharps collection sites. Most healthcare facilities in Minnesota do not accept household sharps from patients, however some pharmacies do.

To locate Minnesota household sharps collection sites, contact your county solid waste office, or visit <https://safeneedledisposal.org/>



SafeNeedleDisposal.org
Safety is the point.

- Do not bring household sharps to a 'Take It to the Box' household medication dropbox at a pharmacy or law enforcement station — sharps may not be placed into medication dropboxes. For more information on how to safely dispose of unwanted household medications, visit <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/news-and-stories/dont-flush-medicines-down-the-drain>.
- Dispose of prefilled syringes, such as EpiPen™ or naloxone autoinjectors, with your household sharps.

Good option, but more expensive Mail back service

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



Poor option, but allowed Normal trash

If you cannot get to a household sharps collection site or mail your household sharps, you may place your labeled, closed and taped 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 containers with sharps into your recycling; only trash.
- **Never** place loose sharps into the trash or recycling; only in the trash in a labeled, closed and taped container.



3. Alternative; Destroying sharps at home

Devices marketed for destroying sharps at home include needle cutters or 'clippers' and needle grinders or melters. The MPCA does not approve or endorse particular home sharps destruction devices. **For your safety, the MPCA cautions any household considering destroying sharps at home to only use products that prevent any possibility of contact with needles or needle fragments during or after use.**

Needle cutters or clippers: These devices cut most of the needle from the syringe and store the cut ends in a case.

The plastic barrel of the syringe may be disposed loose into the trash (**not in the recycling**). Once the case is full of needles, dispose of the case as a sharps container at a household sharps collection site, through a mail back service, or, if these are not available, into your normal trash after taping and labeling it.

Needle grinders or melters: These devices turn the needle from a syringe into a powder or non-sharp metal bead. All parts of the syringe and needle may be safely disposed into your normal trash after destruction.



Note for health care providers and other businesses: The guidance in this fact sheet is intended for households and individual citizens only. Health care providers and other businesses that generate regulated infectious waste may not use the allowances described in this fact sheet and must instead comply with the requirements explained in MPCA fact sheet #w-sw4-30, available at: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-sw4-30.pdf>