

Maine Department of Environmental Protection

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Safe Disposal of Household Medical Sharps

Each year, thousands of Mainers use millions of syringes, pen needles and lancets or “sharps” to control medical conditions like diabetes, arthritis and allergies. Stockpiling used sharps in the home or improper disposal by throwing them in the trash or flushing them down the toilet puts you and your family, janitorial and solid waste staff, and the general public at risk for accidental and painful needle sticks that can lead to infection, tetanus and transmission of diseases.

If you or a loved one use sharps at home, you are allowed under Maine law to dispose of them in your household trash if you take the proper precautions to secure and label the container before doing so.

Homemade Household Sharps Containers



Make your own sharps container using a heavy puncture-proof plastic bottle – like for laundry detergent. Place sharps in the bottle and when it's full, seal it with the cap and heavy-duty tape, mark “Do Not Recycle” and simply place in your household trash.

There are also products for sale – usually at your local pharmacy – that make containment convenient and that can be thrown away in your regular trash when full.

Needle Clipping Devices



Devices that clip the needle off a syringe allow you to throw the remaining piece in your household trash. When the device is full, wrap it in heavy-duty tape and throw in the trash too.

Maine Residents: Request a free needle clipping device, courtesy of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Becton, Dickinson and Company, and Rite Aid Pharmacy.

Designated Sharps Containers



Rigid home sharps containers with locking lids may be placed in your household trash when full. While these containers may be available for purchase at your local pharmacy, some manufacturers may also provide them free of charge through patient support programs.

Mail-Back Sharps Containers/Envelopes



Pre-paid mail-back containers or envelopes, available for purchase at your local pharmacy, are designed to be filled and mailed back to the manufacturer or manufacturer's disposal partner for proper disposal.