



Infectious Waste

Infectious waste is any waste capable of producing an infectious disease in a susceptible person. Improper disposal of these wastes carries the risk of infection, can physically injure unsuspecting people that come in contact with it, and can pollute the environment. Individuals play an important role in the safe management of household-generated infectious wastes like sharps, contaminated bandages, and old medicines.

Sharps Disposal

Used sharps should never be placed loosely in your trash or flushed down the toilet. This increases the risk of accidental exposure for sanitation and sewage treatment workers, janitors, and your family. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (the Department) recommends that needles, syringes, lancets and other sharps generated by individuals be collected in a sharps container and be sent to a collection site for proper disposal.

There are many commercially available mail-in programs offered including:

- Allegro Medical www.allegromedical.com
- Becton-Dickinson www.bddiabetes.com/us/
- EnviroMed Safety and Compliance www.enviromedinc.com
- GRP & Associates www.sharpsdisposal.com
- Medasend Biomedical www.medasend.com
- Sharps Compliance Corp. www.sharpsinc.com
- Stericycle www.stericycle.com/sharps-disposal.html
- Waste and Compliance Management www.homesharpsdisposal.com
- Waste Management www.thinkgreenfromhome.com/SyringesAndLancets.cfm
- XMED Disposal www.xmeddisposal.com

Some of these mail-back sharps disposal systems may also be available at your local pharmacy or

through your health care provider.

At this time, there are three local collection programs that accept sharps from households. *These services are restricted to residents of the counties that sponsor them.* One program is at the Mesa County Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) facility in Grand Junction. If you live in Mesa County and would like more information on this program, call 256-9543 or visit their website at www.mesacounty.us/swm/ and follow the link for Hazardous Waste.

Another program is at the Larimer County Household Hazardous Waste facility in Fort Collins. If you live in Larimer County and would like more information on this program, call 498-5773 or 498-5771, or visit their website at www.larimer.org/solidwaste/haz.htm.

The third program is at the El Paso County Household Hazardous Waste facility in Colorado Springs. If you live in El Paso or Teller counties and would like more information on this program, call 520-7878, or visit the Environmental Division on the county website at <http://adm.elpasoco.com/>.

A variety of products are also available that destroy sharps and make them safer for disposal in the trash. Some of these melt the needle and syringe into a harmless plastic “puck,” and some destroy the needle or otherwise render it harmless. Sharps destruction units have a higher initial cost, but may be more cost effective in the long run depending on how many sharps you generate. Another option is to contract with a medical waste disposal company for sharps container disposal. Medical waste disposal companies can be found in a telephone directory generally under the listing for “Waste Disposal – Medical.”

If these are not viable options for you, household-generated sharps may be disposed of in your trash. This is the least preferred option, but it may be the

one most suitable for your situation. The sharps should be placed in a strong plastic or metal container with a screw-on or tightly secured lid to prevent accidental contact with the waste. Containers like empty bleach bottles, liquid detergent bottles, or heavy plastic jugs work well because they are strong enough to prevent the sharps from poking through the container and they have lids that can be securely fastened. A coffee can may also be used as long as the lid is sealed with strong tape once the container is full. The sealed container should be clearly labeled with the word "Sharps" and can then be placed in your regular trash. Trash containing sharps containers should be kept out of the reach of children and pets until it can be picked up by your trash disposal service or taken to the landfill.

DO NOT PUT CONTAINERS CONTAINING SHARPS IN WITH YOUR RECYCLABLES. Sharps are not recyclable. Not only can they pose an infection risk to workers at the recycling facility, but they can render the whole batch of recyclables unusable as well as cause equipment malfunction. Glass should never be used as a sharps container because the glass can break and compound the hazard.

Bandages and Dressings Disposal

Soiled bandages, dressings and disposable sheets should be placed in securely fastened plastic bags before being placed in your regular trash. Trash containing these potentially infectious wastes should be stored out of the reach of children and pets until it can be picked up by your trash disposal service or taken to the landfill.

Medicines

Flushing even small quantities of household medicines down the drain is strongly discouraged. Some medicines can disrupt or destroy the useful microorganisms in the sewage treatment system and/or may pass through the system intact and contaminate downstream water resources.

The preferred option for disposing of household medicines, including over-the-counter drugs and prescription medicines, is to take them to a

pharmaceutical take-back program if one is offered in your area. Check with your local government to see if they are aware of or are sponsoring a collection program.

If that is not an option, out-of-date or otherwise unusable or unwanted household medicines may be disposed of in the trash if the materials are securely wrapped to minimize tampering. The Department recommends that you remove the medicine from its original container, crush and mix the medicine with an undesirable substance such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter, then seal the mixture in a disposable container with a lid or in a plastic bag. If you have prescription containers, conceal or remove all personal information, including your medical identification number and prescription number. The medicine containers and container with the mixture can then be placed in your regular trash. Trash containing disposed medicines should be stored out of the reach of children and pets until it can be picked up by your trash disposal service or taken to the landfill.

For more information:

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Division Website <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/hm/>
Regulations <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/regulations>
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This Compliance Bulletin is intended to provide guidance on the appropriate management of wastes based on Colorado solid and hazardous waste statutes and regulations only. The wastes described in this guidance may also be regulated under other statutes and regulations.