

## Safe Disposal of “Sharps”

*Insulin syringes, insulin pen needles, and lancets*

*Diabetes supplies such as insulin syringes, insulin pen needles, and lancets are often called “sharps.” This handout describes how to safely dispose of sharps after you use them.*

### Why is it important to dispose of sharps in a special way?

Safely disposing of sharps will help protect yourself and others from injury. You will also help lower the risk of spreading germs that can cause hepatitis or AIDS, since these germs can enter the body if the skin is punctured.



See pages 2 and for where to dispose of sharps.

### How do I safely dispose of sharps?

**NEVER** throw away sharps by putting them in your regular trash or waste containers. If you throw these supplies into your trash:

- You could cause an accidental puncture wound (“poke”) to someone else. Even if you clip off your needles with a special device, it might still have a small sharp “nub.”
- You could be fined for not disposing of sharps in the right way.
- Your trash may not be picked up.

### How to Handle Sharps

- **NEVER share your supplies with anyone else.** Serious diseases are spread by direct contact with infected blood. If you use insulin syringes, insulin pen needles, or lancets that were already used by someone else, you may be exposing yourself to these diseases.
- **If you find a used syringe or needle, do NOT pick it up with your bare hands.** Use a paper towel, shovel, or broom and dustpan to pick it up. Then, dispose of it properly.
- **Keep all sharps out of the reach of children and pets.**

Information in this handout about disposal of sharps in King County and the City of Seattle was taken from the Public Health – Seattle & King County website on June 6, 2013:

[www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/hiv/resources/disposal.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/hiv/resources/disposal.aspx)

## Where do I dispose of sharps?

Guidelines for safe disposal of sharps vary depending on where you live. Follow these guidelines for supplies that you used at home:

### In King County, outside Seattle city limits:

You can dispose of sharps, including syringes with clipped needles, in the garbage IF:

- You place the sharps in a labeled, puncture-resistant container, such as a strong plastic 2-liter PET (*polyethylene terephthalate*) pop bottle with a tight-fitting or taped lid.

AND

- You label the container: “SHARPS – DO NOT RECYCLE.”

### In the City of Seattle:

You cannot put any syringes or other sharps, even if clipped, in the garbage. Instead, they must be placed in a puncture-resistant container with a tight-fitting lid. Label the container “SHARPS – DO NOT RECYCLE.”

Take the container to the South Recycling and Disposal station (dump), and place it in the collection bin. You may only dispose of 1 container at a time. The Seattle transfer station is open 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., 7 days a week. The address is 130 South Kenyon St., Seattle, WA 98108.

### At Public Health Centers:

Public health centers only accept sharps you used at home. Some sites have secure outdoor drop boxes you can use 24 hours a day. The drop boxes are part of Public Health’s disease control program. (See “Using Drop Boxes” on page 3.)

Syringe drop boxes can be used 24 hours a day at these public health centers:

**Auburn Public Health Center**, 206.296.8400  
901 Auburn Way N., Suite A, Auburn, WA 98002

**Downtown Public Health Center**, 206.296.4755  
2124 4th Ave., Seattle, WA 98121

**Eastgate Public Health Center**, 206.296.9770  
14350 S.E. Eastgate Way, Bellevue, WA 98007

**Federal Way Public Health Center**, 206.296.8410  
33431 13th Pl. S., Federal Way, WA 98003

### Your Local Garbage Company:

Call your own local garbage service provider to find out how to dispose of sharps in your area.

## Using Drop Boxes

The drop boxes will accept used sharps, whether they are in a container or loose. But, it's safer for everyone if you put your sharps and syringes in an approved container:

- Put your used sharps and syringes in a manufactured sharps container or a 2-liter PET plastic pop bottle.
- Make sure the lid fits tightly, then tape it shut for added safety.
- If you use a plastic pop bottle, label it with the warning: "SHARPS – DO NOT RECYCLE."
- Bring your full container to the drop-box site. You will be responsible for putting your sharps in the drop box. Your container will not be returned.
- If your container is bigger than a 2-liter pop bottle, or if the drop box is full:
  - DO NOT try to cram it into the box.
  - DO NOT leave containers or loose syringes sitting next to the drop box.
  - Bring your items inside to the clinic's reception desk.
  - If the clinic is closed, take your container home with you and return during the clinic's usual open hours.

## Can I return used syringes, pen needles, and lancets to my UW Medicine doctor's office or clinic?

UW Medicine hospitals and clinics cannot accept used syringes, pen needles, or lancets.

## Where to Buy Sharps Containers

Many pharmacies sell approved sharps containers. They may also have a return program. There is usually a cost for the disposal service.

Call your local pharmacy to see if they provide this type of service.

Outside the Seattle area, call your local health department for instructions on buying sharps containers. To learn more, visit: [www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/hiv/resources/disposal.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/hiv/resources/disposal.aspx).

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Endocrine and Diabetes  
Care Center: 206.598.4882

UW Medicine  
Neighborhood Clinics:  
206.520.5000