

Medical Waste Disposal

October 2011



Solid Waste Program

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Environmental Health*

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of
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Conservation**

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Medical waste is generated by hospitals, dental clinics, physician's offices, medical laboratories, medical research facilities and veterinary clinics as the result of treatments, immunizations, surgeries, diagnostic procedures, autopsies, or other medical procedures. Medical waste can also be generated through body modification shops such as where body piercing, tattoo, or permanent cosmetic coloring is practiced. In addition to these facilities, personal health care and veterinary care at home can generate medical waste.

What is Medical Waste?

Medical waste includes anything that is potentially pathogenic or infectious (i.e. could carry or transmit disease). Examples of medical waste include:

- Blood and other bodily fluids;
- Blood-soaked bandages, compresses, etc;
- Tissues, such as organs or biopsy samples;
- Used and unused hypodermic needles from the injection of insulin or other prescribed drugs;
- Tattoo and body piercing needles;
- Home kidney dialysis filter, bags, and equipment;
- Automatic lancets used for blood sampling;
- Contaminated gloves or other protective materials; or
- Culture materials and swabs.

Medical Waste from Facilities

Medical waste from facilities must be properly treated prior to disposal to prevent transmission of disease. Under state regulations, acceptable treatment processes are those that involve decontamination, incineration, or sterilization of the waste. Hospitals, clinics, medical laboratories, veterinarians, home health providers, and body modification shops are responsible for properly treating and disposing of all medical wastes. Each facility should have a procedure in place to ensure that medical waste is collected and treated prior to disposal. Facilities that do not have their own autoclave or incinerator should collect and ship medical waste to an appropriate treatment facility prior to disposal.

"Sharps" such as used hypodermic needles can present a physical hazard as well as a disease hazard.





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Medical Waste from Home Health Care

Medical waste can also be generated in the home by people who are collecting samples, treating a disease condition, recovering from surgery, or recuperating after an injury in their own home. If you have a home health nurse, they may be able to collect the medical waste from your home on their regularly scheduled visits. This waste is potentially harmful, and should not be thrown in the garbage like regular trash.

If you are managing diabetes, allergies, or another medical condition yourself or for someone in your home, contact your local pharmacy, medical service provider, health clinic, or hospital for disposal options. In most cases, your health care provider will accept home health waste and can treat and dispose of the waste for you. A second disposal option is to contact a local medical waste disposal company. They sometimes accept home medical waste at little or no charge. Mail back companies are a third disposal option. They typically provide the waste container, a box for mailing, and shipping costs. For a list of these companies, search for 'mail back medical waste' on any Internet search engine such as <http://www.google.com>.

Medical Waste from Home Pet Care

Medical waste also includes any medication, instruments or syringes from treating pets for conditions such as diabetes, allergies, wound treatments and postoperative care or even routine vaccines. For home animal related medical waste, contact your veterinarian office. Most offices will take back used sharps and medical waste for proper disposal from medications or treatments they have prescribed.

Other Disposal Options for Home Medical Waste

ADEC prefers that medical waste be disposed through medical service providers or medical waste disposal professionals. However if you do not have access to a medical waste service provider, clinic that is able to treat medical waste, or a medical waste disposal company, you must handle medical waste carefully to protect yourself and others such as waste collection workers and landfill workers. Place all sharps and potentially infectious waste in a puncture-resistant container with a sealing lid like a one-liter soda bottle, one gallon juice container, or plastic laundry detergent container. Clearly label the container as medical waste (example "SHARPS: DO NOT OPEN!"), seal tightly, and tape closed for added safety. The container will keep the waste away from others and protect against accidental punctures or cuts.

Never break the needle off of a syringe! This can potentially cause injury or spread disease or germs.

Additional Resources for Sharps Disposal

- Getting Rid of Used Needles, Syringes, and Lancets (University of Florida) - <http://diabetes.ufl.edu/my-diabetes/getting-rid-of-used-needles/>
- Safe Options for Home Needle Disposal (EPA) - <http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/industrial/medical/med-home.pdf>

