

A Guide to the Safe Disposal of Sharps

Information for the General Public

This information will assist you in the safe handling, storage and disposal of sharps.

What are Sharps?

Sharps are items that are potentially contaminated with blood or body fluids that are capable of causing a cut or puncture in the skin.

Sharps include:

- used syringes with needles attached
- used needles
- used razor blades
- broken glass that has come into contact with blood or other body fluids
- lancets

Why should you be concerned about sharps?

- Sharps can contain blood from other people and this blood can carry blood-borne infections like hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV.
- HIV can live on a needle for up to several hours. Hepatitis B and C can live on a needle for up to a week.
- Accidental puncture wounds from a sharp can allow the entry of infection through the skin, resulting in blood-borne infections such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.
- Used sharps are dangerous; they become biomedical waste and must be disposed of properly.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can injure themselves with a contaminated sharp object including;

- Household members when sharps are used by someone in the household
- Neighbourhood children who contact sharps while playing or exploring
- Workers who pick up garbage waste that contain sharps.

How should you handle sharps in a safe manner?

- **Do not** recap, clip, bend or break syringes or needles that are ready for disposal.
- Sharps should be packaged in a hard plastic container or metal tin can with a tight fitting lid. The lid should be reinforced with tape, and the container should be marked "biohazard".
- Glass containers, cardboard containers or cardboard boxes should not be used for disposal of sharps.

To dispose of found sharps or broken glass:

- Use caution at all times.
- If possible, only use tongs to pick up the sharp. If tongs are not available, use thick gloves or a thick cloth taking care not to touch the sharp or cutting edge.
- Always hold sharp or cutting edges away from you.
- Teach children to never touch sharps but to tell an adult about what they found and where.
- For needles found in the community you can contact the AIDS Committee of London (519) 434-1601 or return the needle to them for proper disposal.

Can you place sharps out in normal garbage collection?

NO! Never dispose of sharps (used needles, syringes and lancets) in your garbage or recycling box.

Only broken glass or other items with sharp or jagged edges that have **not** come into contact with blood or body fluids can be discarded for normal garbage collection. These items must be completely sealed inside a cardboard box and clearly labeled as "Caution - Broken Glass" for collectors.

How do I dispose of sharps?

- **Businesses and Health Care Providers** must obtain proper sharps disposal containers and arrange for a contract for disposal from a biomedical waste disposal company.
- **Diabetics** should contact participating pharmacies regarding their needle disposal program.
- **Injection Drug Users** must package sharps in a hard plastic container or metal tin can with a tight fitting lid. The lid of a metal tin can should be reinforced with tape and marked "biohazard". Containers can be obtained from the Counterpoint Needle Exchange. Injection drug users can drop off their used needles and syringes in the appropriate container to the **Counterpoint Needle Exchange** which operates at the following locations:
 - AIDS Committee of London
30-186 King Street, London, ON N6A 1C7 - (519) 434-1601
 - Youth Action Centre
Basement Level, 141 Dundas Street, London - (519) 434-6500 (youth only)
 - Middlesex-London Health Unit, 50 King Street, London - (519) 663-5446 Monday-Thursday 9am-7pm, and Friday 9am-4pm.

All services of the Counterpoint Needle Exchange are free and confidential. Services also include counseling, free condoms and other equipments for safer drug use.

London Cares offers syringe recovery through needle disposal bins located at:

- Victoria Park
- Forks of the Thames
- The Covent Garden Market-Market Lane
- Mission Services Safe Haven
- AIDS Committee of London
- 580 Dundas St.
- 241 Simcoe St.

What should I do if I am exposed to blood while handling a sharp?

If you are exposed to blood while handling a sharp, contact or visit a health care provider as soon as possible. The health care provider will provide advice about the need for blood tests, vaccinations and/or medications. The Middlesex-London Health Unit can also be called for advice (work hours 519-663-5317 ext. 2330; after hours 519-675-7523).

For more information, contact the Middlesex-London Health Unit at 518-663-5317 ext. 2330