



Nebraska Department of
Environmental
Quality

Guidance Documents

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Handling Household Medical Waste: Home, Nursing Home, Assisted Living

This Guidance Document is also
available as an Adobe Acrobat
(PDF) file.
File size is 85 KB



Handling Household Med Waste revised 2013.pdf



What is household medical waste?

Household medical waste is waste that is generated as a result of health care activities in the home. It may include bandages, hypodermic needles and lancets, among other things. The primary focus of this guidance is the management of potential infectious waste.

Should I be concerned about the handling of medical waste from my home?

In general, medical wastes generated in the home are not a serious health concern. However, an exception could be when the medical waste is also an infectious waste. According to Title 132 - Integrated Solid Waste Management Regulations, an infectious waste is any medical waste that is capable of causing disease in another human being if that person comes into contact with the waste. This may include wastes that are contaminated with blood or other body fluids from people who have infectious diseases. For a full regulatory definition of infectious waste see Title 132, Chapter 1, §053 et seq. Infectious diseases, like HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B, are serious and can be fatal. That is why caution is necessary when handling any infectious wastes in your home. Steps should also be taken to protect the people who handle your household waste after it leaves your home.

What am I required to do with my household medical waste?

Household medical waste is considered a solid waste and must be disposed in a permitted municipal solid waste (MSW) landfill like any other type of household waste. If you think the medical waste you are generating in your home is infectious you should either treat the waste in a way that makes it no longer infectious or properly package the waste to reduce the risk of exposing others to possible infection. Household medical waste can be added to your general household waste which is picked up by your garbage hauler or otherwise transported to a permitted MSW landfill. A health provider with access to proper infectious waste management may also accept your household medical waste. Note there is no obligation for any health provider to accept any medical wastes not generated at their own facility.

How do I properly package infectious wastes for disposal?

The department recommends the following guidelines for packaging, transporting, or disposing

infectious wastes generated in the home:

1. Place the waste in a rigid or semi-rigid, puncture-resistant and leak-proof container;
2. Do not mark or label the container in such a way as to divulge the contents;
3. Tightly close or seal the container; and
4. Ensure the outside of the container is free from contamination.

From a practical standpoint, any type of sharp medical wastes, such as needles or lancets, should be placed in a puncture-resistant container whether it is infectious or not. You may wish to obtain a sharps container designed for the purpose of sharps disposal; often they have a one-way opening and come with warning labels. This will protect family members and waste handlers from possible cuts or punctures.

How do home health care nurses need to handle medical wastes?

Any medical waste that is generated in the home should be handled as described above ^{or} transported to the clinic/hospital for disposal. Medical waste from single-family homes collected by a home health care agent can and should be handled in the same manner. However, medical waste generated in hospitals and medical clinics do not qualify for the household waste exemption and must first be rendered non-infectious by incineration, autoclaving or other treatment methods before disposal at any solid waste disposal area. Most clinics and hospitals use a commercial medical waste treatment service.

How about nursing homes or assisted living facilities?

The department views individual quarters where persons routinely reside as a "household" and medical waste generated from those quarters is considered Household Waste as defined at Title 132, Chapter 1, §049. Medical waste generated at a nursing home or assisted living facility in common areas such as nursing stations, examining rooms, or meeting rooms/hallways is not considered household medical waste and cannot be placed in the general trash.

Hospital rooms are not considered "households" by the department. A hospital room, as pleasantly designed as some might be, is not meant to be a residence in the way a nursing home or assisted living resident room is. They are meant for the express purpose of delivering medical treatments, procedures, or medical observation. Some assisted living facilities are closely associated with a connected hospital. If this is the case, the two facilities are separate as far as "household" medical waste generation is concerned. Tracking of medical waste in a dual-purpose facility may be necessary to ensure proper disposal.

Hospital infectious waste?

Hospitals are not allowed to dispose of infectious waste to a MSW landfill unless it is first rendered non-infectious (Title 132, Chapter 13, §004). This is, again, where most facilities hire the services of a commercial medical waste treatment service that will incinerate, autoclave or otherwise render the materials non-infectious before disposing of them in a MSW landfill.

What about old or unused drugs?

A recently assessed group of pollutants in our aquifers and waterways are discarded prescription drugs. Exposure of fish and wildlife to some of these complex pharmaceuticals, even in diluted

form, can be tragic to observe and may affect the environment for generations. Never dispose of them down a sanitary sewer or septic system! See the NDEQ Guidance Document - "Medications and Infectious Waste Disposal" for better and correct ways to dispose of pharmaceuticals. This can be accessed at the NDEQ web site. Keep in mind the best way to manage pharmaceuticals is to procure only the amount you'll need and following doctor's orders use the pharmaceuticals for their intended use until fully consumed.

RESOURCES:

- NDEQ Website: <http://deq.ne.gov/>
- Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department: <http://www.lincoln.gov/city/health/>
- Nebraska Pharmacists Association: [Nebraska MEDS Program](#)

Contacts:

- NDEQ Waste Management Section (402) 471-4210
- NDEQ Toll Free Number (877) 253-2603
- NDEQ Hazardous Waste Compliance Assistance (402) 471-8308

Additional Information*:

- Environmental Guidance Document - "Medical Waste Disposal"
- Environmental Guidance Document - "Medications and Infectious Waste Disposal"

*Can be found on the NDEQ webpage under "Publications & Forms".

Produced by: Waste Management Section, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, P.O. Box 98922, Lincoln, NE 68509-8922; phone (402) 471-4210. To view this, and other information related to our agency, visit our web site at <http://deq.ne.gov/>. This material is intended for guidance purposes only. It is not meant to substitute for the regulations found in Title 128 - Nebraska Hazardous Waste Regulations, Title 132 - Integrated Solid Waste Management Regulations, or any other applicable Nebraska environmental regulations.

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Nebraska: In 2000, the Waste Management Division of the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) developed a fact sheet entitled Handling Household Medical Waste (Click on "Publications/Forms" - "Integrated Waste Management" - "Fact Sheets" - "Handling Household Medical Waste"). This fact sheet provides guidance to residents on how to safely dispose of household-generated "infectious waste," including syringes. The DEQ defines infectious waste as "any medical waste that is capable of causing disease in another human being if that person comes into contact with the waste."

The guidance includes these recommendations:

- Place the waste in a rigid or semi-rigid, puncture resistant and leak-proof container.
- Mark the container prominently with the universal bio-hazard symbol.
- Label the container "Infectious Waste" or "biohazard waste."
- Seal the container.

• Ensure that the outside of the container is free from contamination.

DEQ also recommends that any type of sharp medical waste such as needles or lancets, should be sealed in a puncture resistant container whether it is infectious or not. This will protect family members and waste handlers from possible cuts or punctures."

How to Get Rid of a Sharps Container

Safe Disposal of Needles and Other Sharps Used At Home, At Work, or While Traveling

There are several ways to get rid of a sharps disposal container. Check with your local trash removal services or health department (listed in the city or county government (blue) pages in your phone book) or search the Internet for safe sharps disposal programs available in your area.

Some examples of safe sharps disposal methods are briefly described below:

Drop Box or Supervised Collection Sites

You may be able to drop off your sharps disposal containers at collections sites, such as doctors' offices, hospitals, pharmacies, health departments, medical waste facilities, and police or fire stations. Services may be free or have a nominal fee.

Household Hazardous Waste Collection Sites

You may be able to drop off your sharps disposal containers at local public household hazardous waste collection sites. These are sites that also commonly accept hazardous materials such as household cleaners, paints, and motor oil.

Mail-Back Programs

You may be able to mail certain FDA-cleared sharps disposal containers to a collection site for proper disposal. This service usually requires a fee. Fees vary, depending on the size of the container. Follow the manufacturer's instructions included with the disposal container, as these programs may have specific requirements for mail-back.

Residential Special Waste Pickup Services

Your community may provide pick-up services using a sharps disposal container acceptable to the pick up company, either provided to you by the pickup services company or one that you already own, depending on the company guidelines for pick up. The container is placed outside the home for collection by trained special waste handlers. Some programs require customers to call for pickup, while others offer regular pickup schedules.

For more information specific to your state:

Visit the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal's Safe Needle Disposal Web site to find information including:

- types of sharps containers that can be used,
- disposal programs in your area,
- how to label your sharps disposal containers,
- how to secure the lid of your sharps disposal container, and
- whether sharps disposal containers can be thrown away in the common trash.

