

NIH Clinical Center Patient Education Materials

Handling Sharp Objects Safely at Home

This information provides tips for safe handling and disposal of sharp objects used for health care at home. By working safely with sharp objects, you can prevent injuries and infections. You will also be doing your part to cut down on environmental pollution.

Types of sharp objects

Items that require special handling and disposal include:

- Needles
- Syringes
- Lancets

Types of containers used for disposing of sharp objects

Sharp objects should be placed in hard plastic or metal containers with screw-on caps or tightly secured lids. Examples include:

- Thick bleach or laundry detergent bottles (the best choice)
- Sharps container provided by your care team

Do not use glass or clear plastic containers. Sharp objects should not be placed in containers that will be recycled or returned to a store. They also should not be flushed down the toilet or thrown directly into the trash; this is to prevent injury to people working with waste disposal.

Disposal of sharp objects

- When your container is three-quarters full, take it for proper disposal.
- If you live near the NIH, return the container to the NIH Clinical Center.
- If you use public transportation such as planes or trains to come to the NIH, return the filled container to your local hospital or doctor's office.

Other precautions

- Do not recap needles after they have been used.
- Keep containers with sharp objects out of the reach of children and pets. Do not recycle containers.

Contact your local Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) if you would like more information on safe waste disposal or if you are unable to return the filled container to a health care facility. You may also contact the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal (safeneedledisposal.org) for your state's sharps' disposal instructions.

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Questions about the NIH Clinical Center?

<http://www.cc.nih.gov/comments.shtml>

