

# Safe Needle Disposal

What you need  
to know



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**Public Health**  
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SUDBURY & DISTRICTS

# Reasons for using needles

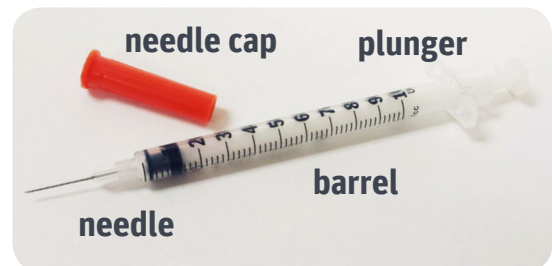
- People use needles for many different purposes. There are many medical conditions that involve the use of needles. Diabetes is the most common. People with conditions like cancer and arthritis use needles for medicine to control pain. Some people use needles to inject illicit drugs.
- Everyone who uses needles has the same need to get rid of their used needles safely. With safe disposal, no one gets hurt accidentally.

## Needle use in pictures

Here are pictures and descriptions of items that are common to needle use.

### What does a needle look like?

The needles used at home or by persons who inject drugs look the same as the needle you see in a doctor's office. Needles are also called "syringes or sharps".



### What are these small metal cups?

These are called cookers and are used for mixing and heating the drug prior to injection.



### What are these plastic vials?

Sterile water can be used to prepare injection drugs and come in small blue or clear plastic vials.



### What is a tourniquet?

It is a thin and flexible strip of rubber used to compress an arm for the veins to bulge out to make injecting easier.



### What is a sharps container?

A sharps container is made of hard plastic with a top that can be sealed. It is made to safely hold used needles. Sharps containers, or "biohazard containers", come in many sizes and can hold a large number of needles. You can buy a sharps container at many pharmacies.



# Who can accidentally get poked by a needle?

People using needles need a way to throw them out after they are finished using them. Without wanting to harm anyone else, they might throw the needles in the garbage or on the ground if they don't see an easy way to safely get rid of them. Anyone can get hurt if they accidentally get poked.

## How could a person get hurt? Here are some examples:

### *Handling used needles*

- A person who tries to put the cap back on a needle.
- Carrying loose needles without a container.

### *Unsafe disposal*

- A child in a playground can pick up a needle tucked under a bush.
- A person looking through garbage if someone disposed of a needle in the waste bin.
- A parks maintenance person can get poked if there are needles hidden in a flowerbed or under a shrub in a park.
- A worker who is cleaning public washrooms or hotel rooms can get poked if needles are hidden in tissue or waste baskets.
- A city waste collector can get poked by a needle sticking out of a garbage bag. Even needles in food containers can poke out if the container gets crushed.





# What are the risks of touching used needles?

When a person finishes using a needle, some of that person's blood can still be inside the needle. If you get poked by a needle and the blood gets into your bloodstream, you could get sick.

The vast majority of people will not get sick by picking up or being poked by a used needle, but it is extremely important to be cautious. When viruses in needles are exposed to the open air, the viruses usually die within minutes to hours. That is why most people will not get sick by picking up or being poked by a used needle. However, there is no way to know how long a needle has been lying where you found it, so it is best to be safe.

## If you get poked by a needle, you could get sick with:

- tetanus
- hepatitis B
- hepatitis C
- HIV

## What is tetanus?

Tetanus is an infection that causes severe muscle spasms that can make it hard to breathe, or even break bones. You can get tetanus:

- from the bacteria in or on needles that are not clean (sterilized)
- when you have an open cut and you touch bacteria in soil, feces, or rusted metal

Tetanus is treated with antibiotics.



## You can prevent tetanus by:

- safely disposing of used needles
- using a new needle every time
- not touching feces or rusted metal with your bare hands
- make sure you are up to date with your tetanus vaccine

## What are hepatitis B and C?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus. The illness can be mild with few symptoms in some people, while others can experience severe disease lasting for weeks or months.

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus. The infection can cause swelling and scarring of the liver. Some can carry the infection in their blood for a lifetime and are at risk of long-term liver problems.

Both hepatitis B and C is spread when the blood of a person with the virus comes in contact with the blood of another person. You can get this infection if you:

- share needles or other injection equipment
- get poked by needle with infected blood
- have unprotected sex

## You can prevent getting or passing hepatitis to someone else by:

- using new needles and equipment every time
- practising safer sex (ex. using a condom)
- getting the hepatitis vaccine (there is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C)
- disposing of used needles safely



## What are HIV and AIDS?

The body is usually protected from illness by the immune system. When Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infects the body, it weakens the immune system. The infected person can easily get sick with rare and hard to treat infections and cancers. When the immune system is badly damaged, a person can develop Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

- HIV is found in several body fluids of an infected person. It is spread through blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk, and dies quickly when exposed to air.
- HIV is spread by having unprotected sex.
- HIV is spread by sharing needles and injection equipment.
- There is no vaccine and no cure for HIV at this time.

## You can greatly reduce the risk of getting or spreading HIV if you:

- use new needles and equipment every time
- practise safer sex (ex. using a condom)
- use an acceptable alternative to breastfeeding if you are HIV positive

# What should you do if you get poked by a needle?

If you get poked by a needle allow the poke site to bleed freely and gently wash it with soap and water. See a health care provider or go to a local emergency department for further assessment as soon as possible.



## Don't put used needles

### In the garbage.

Waste collectors can get poked when needles are loose and pierce the bag. If needles are in a container, the container can get crushed and the needles can poke through.



### In the recycling bin.

Needles are not recyclable. A waste management worker sorts all the recycled items we put in recycling bins by hand. A worker could get poked by a needle.



### Down the toilet or the sewer.

People could get poked and it's an environmentally unclean.



### On the ground, under a bush, or tucked into places they won't be seen.

A child, adult, worker, or pet could get poked by a needle.

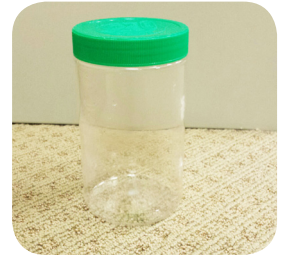


# Steps to safely dispose of needles

1. Find a hard, non-breakable container that needles cannot poke through with a screw-on or tight fitting lid (examples, rigid detergent bottle, bleach bottle).
  - Do not use glass containers as they can easily break.
  - Do not use light plastic containers or a milk carton as the needles could poke through.
  - Some pharmacies are part of the “Take It Back” Ontario Sharps Collection program and may provide a sharps container free-of-charge.
2. Put the container on a stable surface next to the sharp.
  - Do not hold the container in your hand when placing the sharp inside.
  - Do not touch the sharp with your bare hand.
3. Use tongs or pliers to pick up the needle by the plastic end (not the sharp end), with the needle pointing away from your body.
  - Do not try to put the cap back on the needle.
4. Place the needle, sharp end first, into your sharps container.
  - Do not force the needle into the container.
5. Tightly seal the lid (use duct tape if you have it).
6. Label your container as “sharps” and store it far out of reach of children.
7. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer.
8. Take your container to a safe needle disposal location.

If you are not comfortable picking up the needle and need more information, you can call:

- The City of Greater Sudbury by dialing 3-1-1 (if found on public property).
- The Point - harm reduction supplies and services, at 705.522.9200, ext. 778.





# Disposing of used needles

Home and property owners are responsible for picking up and disposing of needles found on their properties. Once home or property owners collect the needles, they can dispose of them using one of these services:

## Outdoor bio-hazard disposal bins

A list of outdoor bio-hazard disposal bins can be found at:

[ohrdp.ca/find/community-disposal-bins-ontario](http://ohrdp.ca/find/community-disposal-bins-ontario)

## Public Health Sudbury & Districts

**Rainbow Centre, 10 Elm Street, Unit 130, Sudbury**  
Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

**1300 Paris Street, Sudbury**

Outdoor drop-off kiosk, accessible at any time

## Toxic Taxi

**705.560.9019**

The Toxic Taxi is a service in Greater Sudbury where a special collection truck will come to your home to pick up your collected needles. You must leave your name, phone number, and alternate phone number in a voicemail. Someone will return your call to schedule your pick-up appointment. Any sharps picked up by the Toxic Taxi must meet these requirements:

- People are first encouraged to drop off their waste at the Household Hazardous Waste Depot and to use the services of the Toxic Taxi as an alternate option. Needles must be inside a puncture-proof container with a well-fitting lid that is sealed with duct tape.
- Container must be clearly labelled as “sharps”.
- For safety reasons, someone must be home at the time of pick up.

## Household Hazardous Waste Depot

**183 Frobisher Street, Sudbury**

Needles can be dropped off, but must be inside a puncture-proof container with a well-fitting lid that is sealed with duct tape. The container must be clearly labelled as “sharps”.

The depot is open on some (not all) Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Please call the City of Greater Sudbury at 3-1-1 for the dates the depot is open.

## Local Pharmacies

Some pharmacies are part of the “Take It Back” Ontario Sharps Collection program and will accept needles from consumers at no charge during regular business hours. Participating pharmacies only accept sharps in an approved hard-shell container, which is labelled with the universal or cytotoxic biohazard symbol. For a list of participating pharmacies in your area, visit: [healthsteward.ca/returns/ontario](http://healthsteward.ca/returns/ontario)



Ce document est également disponible en français.

Adapted with permission from the “Safe Needle Disposal Toolkit” City of Edmonton, September 2019