



## **Infectious Waste**

Infectious waste is any waste capable of producing an infectious disease in a susceptible person. Improper disposal of these wastes carries the risk of infection, can physically injure unsuspecting people that come in contact with it, and can pollute the environment. Individuals play an important role in the safe management of household-generated infectious wastes like sharps (needles, syringes, lancets) and contaminated bandages and dressings.

### **Sharps Disposal**

Used sharps should never be placed loosely in your trash or flushed down the toilet. This increases the risk of accidental exposure for sanitation and sewage treatment workers, janitors, and your family. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment recommends that needles, syringes, lancets and other sharps generated by individuals be collected in a sharps container and be sent to a collection site for proper disposal.

There are many commercially available mail-in programs offered including: Waste Management, Inc. (1-877-927-8363), Becton-Dickinson (BD) (1-888-232-2737), AllegroMedical.com (1-800-861-3211), and Bio-Express, Inc. (1-877-282-5222). Some of these mail-back sharps disposal systems may also be available at your local pharmacy or through your health care provider. To extend the capacity of your sharps container, you may want to use a needle clipping device (do not use regular scissors because there isn't a needle guard to keep the needle from flying off in a random direction). Once the needle is safely clipped off, it can be placed in the sharps container and the rest of the syringe disposed of in the trash.

At this time, there is one local collection program that accepts sharps from households and small clinics, doctors offices and pharmacies. This is at the Mesa County Household Hazardous Waste

(HHW) facility in Grand Junction. *These services are restricted to residents and businesses in Mesa County.* If you live in Mesa County and would like more information on this program, call 256-9543 or visit their website at [www.co.mesa.co.us](http://www.co.mesa.co.us) and follow the link for Solid Waste Management.

A variety of products are available that destroy sharps and make them safe for disposal in the trash. Some of these melt the needle and syringe into a harmless plastic "puck," and some destroy the needle or otherwise render it harmless. Sharps destruction units have a higher initial cost, but may be more cost effective in the long run depending on how many sharps you generate. Another option is to contract with a medical waste disposal company for sharps container disposal. If this option is of interest, medical waste disposal companies can be found in the yellow pages under the listing for "Waste Disposal – Medical."

If these are not viable options for you, household-generated sharps may be disposed of in your trash. This is the least preferred option, but it may be the one most suitable for your situation. The sharps should be placed in a strong plastic or metal container with a screw-on or tightly secured lid to prevent accidental contact with the waste. Containers like empty bleach bottles, liquid detergent bottles, or heavy plastic jugs work well because they are strong enough to prevent the sharps from poking through the container and they have lids that can be securely fastened. A coffee can may also be used as long as the lid is sealed with strong tape once the container is full. The sealed container can then be placed in your regular trash. Trash including sharps containers should be kept out of the reach of children and pets until they can be picked up by your trash disposal service or taken to the landfill.

Recyclable containers should not be used as home sharps containers unless obviously labeled as containing sharps. Sharps are not recyclable and

not only can they pose an infection risk to workers at the recycling facility, but can render the whole batch of recyclables unusable. Glass should never be used as a sharps container because the glass can break and compound the hazard.

### **Bandages and Dressings Disposal**

Soiled bandages, dressings and disposable sheets should be placed in securely fastened plastic bags before being placed in your regular trash. Trash containing potentially infectious wastes should be stored out of the reach of children and pets until they can be picked up by your trash disposal service or taken to the landfill.

### **Medicines**

Household medicines, including over-the-counter drugs and prescription medicines, can usually be disposed of safely without presenting a threat to the environment. Out-of-date or otherwise unusable or unwanted household medicines may be disposed of in the trash if the materials are securely wrapped to minimize tampering. Trash containing disposed medicines should be stored out of the reach of children and pets until it can be picked up by your trash disposal service or taken to the landfill.

Flushing even small quantities of household medicines down the drain is discouraged. Some medicines can disrupt or destroy the useful microorganisms in the sewage treatment system and/or may pass through the system intact and potentially contaminate downstream water resources.

### **For more information:**

**Colorado Department of  
Public Health & Environment**

**Hazardous Materials and  
Waste Management Division  
4300 Cherry Creek Drive South  
Denver, Colorado 80246-1530**

*Customer Technical Assistance (303) 692-3320  
(888) 569-1831 Ext. 3320 toll-free*

Division Website <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/hm/>  
Regulations <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/regulate.asp>  
E-mail [comments.hmwm@state.co.us](mailto:comments.hmwm@state.co.us)

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This Compliance Bulletin is intended to provide guidance on the appropriate management of wastes based on Colorado solid and hazardous waste statutes and regulations only. The wastes described in this guidance may also be regulated under other statutes and regulations.