

Safe Needle Disposal

The following information outlines how to safely dispose of needles. Evidence-based strategies to improve safe needle disposal in communities and instructions for safe handling and disposal of a discarded needle are also covered. The term 'needle' is used to include the needle with the attached syringe.

SAFE NEEDLE DISPOSAL

Needles are used by a wide range of community members, including people with diabetes or other medical conditions, pet owners and people who use illicit substances. When needles are discarded improperly in a public place, it is often a result of not having a place to properly dispose of them. People do not intend to harm others by discarding used needles, but rather need an easy way to dispose of them safely. Harm reduction programs, which distribute sterile needles and other harm reduction supplies, play a key role in safe needle disposal through:

- Distribution of small sharps containers for personal use.
- Accepting used sharps back for disposal.
- Providing safe needle disposal education to people who use drugs and other community members.
- Conducting regular sweeps of the areas in which they operate.

Studies show that after a needle distribution program opens in a community, the number of observed needles discarded in public places does not increase, and might actually decline. A list of harm reduction supply distribution and collection sites in your area can be found at: www.towardtheheart.com/site-locator.

HOW TO IMPROVE SAFE NEEDLE DISPOSAL

Evidence-based strategies recommended to improve safe needle disposal efforts within communities include:

- Sharps disposal containers in public washrooms (installed in the stalls).
- Sharps disposal containers/community drop boxes located in areas where improper disposal of needles tends to occur.
- Inclusion of pharmacies in disposal programs wherever possible.
- Increasing the hours of operation of harm reduction supply distribution and collection sites.
- Consideration of supervised consumption and overdose prevention sites in communities where appropriate.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A DISCARDED NEEDLE

If a discarded needle is found in a public place, the local health unit can be contacted (or the needle pick-up hotline, if located in Vancouver) to find out about collection options. Alternatively, the following steps should be taken to safely dispose of the needle:

- 1. Find a rigid plastic container with a secure lid (e.g. plastic drink bottle with a wide mouth, liquid laundry bottle).**
 - Remove the lid and place the container on the ground beside the needle.
 - Do not break or recap the needle.
- 2. Pick up the needle by the centre of the syringe barrel with care.**
 - Use work or latex gloves, or tongs, if available.
 - Always point the sharp end of the needle down and away from you.
- 3. Put the needle in the container, sharp-end first, and secure the lid.**
 - While doing this step, the container should be on the ground; do not hold it in your hand.
- 4. Remove gloves and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.**
- 5. Drop off the sealed container at a local health unit, pharmacy or community drop box.**