

Safe sharps disposal

What to do if you find a needle or other harm reduction paraphernalia



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About this document

This document provides an overview of the possible sharps found in public areas, the associated risks, and the steps to dispose of them safely. A “sharp” is any object that may puncture the skin, such as needles, syringes, glass pipes or stems, or blades. This document includes pictures of the various sharps, disposal containers and resources in your local community.

What resources are available?

Island Health has resources for communities and individuals interested in safe sharps disposal:

- Safe disposal rack card
- Safe sharps disposal document

How are needles used?

Needles are used to transfer fluid into or out of the body. Needles are commonly used by people living with diabetes to deliver insulin. People also use needles to administer medicine or drugs. Needles and other injection supplies, such as syringes, lancets and glass pipes or stems are known as “sharps.” Everyone who uses needles needs accessible places to safely dispose of them.

How do you dispose of sharps?

The vast majority of needles are properly disposed of in appropriate containers. Sharps disposal containers are available in some public bathrooms and other publicly accessible areas. Portable sharps containers can be obtained from and returned to public health units and services offering harm reduction supplies.

Some pharmacies take back needles from their customers. Free needle distribution services are also available for people who inject drugs. Many local governments have installed safe sharps boxes where improperly discarded sharps have been a safety concern for the community. Disposed sharps are then incinerated.

A list of harm reduction supply distribution and collection sites in your area can be found on the provincial website, Toward the Heart: <http://towardtheheart.com/site-locator>

Safe sharps disposal pictures

The syringes and needles used by health care workers look the same as the syringes and needles used at home for diabetic, therapeutic or injection drugs. The following images are of typical medical and harm reduction paraphernalia that you may see in public areas. Wear gloves before handling any of these materials.



needle / syringe

Do not try to recap a needle



lancet



stericup



sterile water



crack pipe / glass stem



crystal meth pipe



0.5 L sharps container



1 L sharps container



Use a hard-sided plastic container to hold sharps



Community drop box

How could I get hurt?

There may be times when a sharps container is not easily accessible and syringes and other sharps may be improperly discarded in public areas, such as alleyways, bushes, garbage cans, parks and playgrounds. When syringes and sharps are not disposed of properly they may pose a risk to unsuspecting community members, including adults, children, youth, public works employees, and pets.

If you sustain a needlestick injury

Discarded needles pose a risk of infection. After a needle is used, some blood may remain inside the needle. If you sustain a needlestick injury, you could get sick. Fortunately, most viruses exposed to open air will die within minutes to hours, and the risk of [contracting an infection is low](#)¹. However, there is no way to know how long a needle has been lying where you found it.

In the event you are poked, scratched or cut by a used needle or other sharp, follow the steps below:

- Quickly wash the pricked area with soap and warm water.
- Allow the wound to bleed freely.
- Do not squeeze the wound to promote bleeding.
- Do not apply bleach to wound.
- Visit your local emergency department immediately for [follow up care](#)².

You can also call the Communicable Disease Program at Island Health for more information:

- South Island: 1-866-665-6626
- Central Island: 1-866-770-7798
- North Island: 1-877-887-8835

¹ Moore, D.L. et al. (2008). Needle stick injuries in the community. Paediatrics & Child Health. 13(3): 205-210. Retrieved May 8, 2017 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2529409/>

² Blood and body fluid exposure management tool. BC Centre for Disease Control. Retrieved May 8, 2017 from http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/CD%20Manual/Chapter%201%20-%20CDC/CPS_CManual_BBF_Tool.pdf

Safe sharps disposal steps

- Don't try to replace the cap on needles
- Don't snap, break or bend needles or other sharps
- Pick up needle with care using work gloves and tongs or tweezers
- Hold needle point away from you
- Put needle in a metal or hard plastic container with a lid (i.e. product or drink bottle)
- Replace cap on container securely and label it
- Remove gloves and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water
- Drop off the sealed container at your local health unit or at a community drop box



Unsafe sharps disposal

Garbage	Waste collectors may be poked, scratched or cut by sharps that are loose in a container. If a container gets crushed, the sharps can break through.
Recycling	Waste management workers sort recycling by hand and may be poked, scratched or cut by a sharp.
Toilet or sewer	Sharps in the sewer system get dumped into the river. Washed up sharps may poke, scratch or cut others and pollute the environment.
Ground or bushes	A child, adult or pet may be poked, scratched or cut.
Hidden places	A person cleaning, such as a janitor or housekeeping staff, may be injured.

Questions? Call your local Public Health Unit (see page 12) or the Communicable Disease Program (page 9).

Where can I dispose of sharps?

Island Health – Public Health Units

Campbell River – 200-1100 Island Highway, Campbell River. Telephone: 250-850-2110

Courtenay – 961 England Ave, Courtenay. Telephone: 250-331-8520

Duncan – 675 Canada Avenue, Duncan. Telephone: 250-709-3050

Esquimalt – 530 Fraser Street, Victoria. Telephone: 250-519-5311

Gold River – 601 Trumpeter Drive, Gold River. Telephone: 250-283-2626

Ladysmith – 1111-4th Avenue, Ladysmith. Telephone: 250-739-5777

Lake Cowichan – 58 Cowichan Avenue W, Lake Cowichan. Telephone: 250-749-6878

Nanaimo – 1665 Grant Avenue, Nanaimo. Telephone: 250-755-3342

Nanaimo – 260 Irwin Street, Nanaimo. Telephone: 250-739-5845

Parksville – 494 Bay Avenue, Parksville. Telephone: 250-947-8242

Peninsula – 2170 Mount Newton X Road, Saanichton. Telephone: 250-544-2400

Port Alberni – 4227 6th Avenue, Port Alberni. Telephone: 250-731-1315

Port Hardy – 7070 Market Street, Port Hardy. Telephone: 250-902-6071

Port McNeil – 1775 Grenville Place, Port McNeill. Telephone: 250-956-4711

Other Gulf Islands – Telephone: 250-539-3099

Saanichton - 3995 Quadra Street, Victoria. Telephone: 250-519-5100

Saltspring – #1 - 137 Crofton Road, Salt Spring Island. Telephone: 250-538-4880

Sooke – # 104 - 6672 Wadams Way, Sooke. Telephone: 250-642-5464

Tofino – 265 First Street, Tofino. Telephone: 250-725-4020

Ucluelet – 500 Matterson Drive, Ucluelet. Telephone: 250-725-4020

Victoria – 1947 Cook Street, Victoria. Telephone: 250-388-2200

Wale Road/West Shore – 345 Wale Rd, Victoria. Telephone: 250-519-3490

To find out if community drop boxes are accessible in your area, contact your local municipal office.

Other locations for drop-off and harm reduction supply distribution can be found at Toward the Heart:

<http://towardtheheart.com/site-locator>