

SUPPORTING YOUR COMMUNITY

INFORMATION ON SAFE DISPOSAL
OF SYRINGES AND OTHER SHARPS

WWW.ISLANDHEALTH.CA



SAFE SHARPS DISPOSAL

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

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

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE

Resources for safe sharps disposal for communities and individuals are available at Island Health’s [website](#). They include:

- Safe sharps disposal rack card
- Safe sharps disposal document
- Videos - how to dispose of sharps safely
- Return your needles/sharps posters & stickers
- Maps - needle disposal sites

WHY ARE SHARPS DISTRIBUTED

Syringes are a common sharp; they are healthcare tools. They are used to deliver medications and treatments to people for a wide variety of healthcare needs. Those healthcare needs can range from an opiate use disorder to diabetes and insulin injections. Using a new syringe for each injection reduces the risk of infections from a blunted or damaged syringe, and also prevents sharing of syringes, reducing transmission of

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HIV, hepatitis B & C. Everyone who uses sharps need accessible resources to dispose of them safely. For more information on harm reduction, including syringe distribution and reduced transmission of communicable diseases, see www.healthlinkbc.ca.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DISPOSING SHARPS?

People who use sharps are responsible for their safe disposal. Like other waste, the vast majority of syringes & other sharps are disposed of appropriately, with only a very small portion discarded inappropriately in community.

In most cases, disposal of syringes & other sharps occurs at public health units, pharmacies, harm reduction sites, outdoor disposal boxes and outreach services. Ideally, every community has a variety of accessible, convenient and confidential opportunities for safe disposal for all community members. Public Health units and harm reduction sites and services provide free sharps disposal containers for safe disposal.

WHAT ARE HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES & WHY ARE THEY DISTRIBUTED?

All regional health authorities participate in the Harm Reduction Strategies & Services (HRSS) committee, supporting equitable access to harm reduction supplies, including safer injection, safer inhalation (smoking) and

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safer sex supplies. These supplies help reduce the risk and incidence of communicable disease transmission, and other injury and infections, that can occur when people do not have the proper health tools to protect themselves. Harm reduction supplies are also important engagement tools for working with people who are stigmatized by the criminalization of people who use drugs, as well as other realms of structural barriers. Sites distributing harm reduction supplies also distribute safe sharps disposal containers and receive returns for safe disposal.

WHERE ARE HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES DISTRIBUTED?

Policy for the provincial syringe-distribution program was established in 2002, and in 2008 the province centralized distribution of harm reduction supplies. Health- and social-care organizations can order harm reduction supplies from the BC Centre for Disease Control. These supplies are commonly distributed at healthcare encounters and settings where people receive other forms of support for their health and well-being. A comprehensive list of distribution sites, providing harm reduction supplies across Vancouver Island can be found at: www.towardtheheart.com/site-finder

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IMAGES OF SHARPS & OTHER HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES



Needle/Syringe



Glass Stem



Bubble Pipe



Lancet



Cooker



Sterile Water



Community Box



.5 Litre



1 Litre

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HOW TO DISPOSE OF A SYRINGE SAFELY

- Stay calm, take a few breaths & take your time
- Retrieve a sharps container or hard-sided container with a screw top lid
- Position the container near the syringe, open the lid, leaving it prepared to deposit the syringe
- You may choose to wear work gloves, latex gloves and/or use garbage grabber/tongs to handle the syringe
- Do not break or recap syringe
- Pick up and hold the syringe by the middle of the barrel with sharp end pointing down and away from you
- Put the syringe/s in the container
- Secure lid and dispose of container
- Wash hands with soap and water

WHERE CAN I DISPOSE OF SHARPS?

Drop off the sealed container at the following:

- Community drop box – [check locations in your community here](#)
- Participating pharmacies
- Your local Public Health Unit
- If necessary, you can also dispose of the sealed container in a nearby waste bin

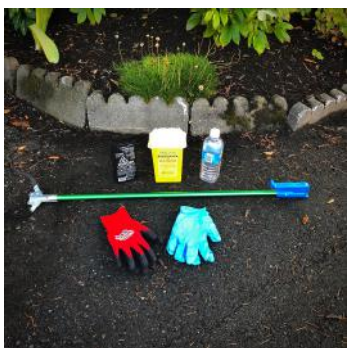
Locations for drop off and pick harm reduction supplies can be found at: www.towardtheheart.com/site-finder

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STEPS TO DISPOSE OF A SYRINGE SAFELY



If you find a discarded syringe, remember to stay calm, and retrieve a sharps disposal container or hard-sided container to safely deposit the syringe.



Gloves are recommended, trash grabber/tongs are another option, to safely interact with the syringe, and any of these containers are suitable.



Position the disposal container so you can easily deposit syringe into container. Open the container so it is ready for depositing the syringe.



Carefully deposit the syringe, sharp end first, follow the same process to safely deposit all syringes, before closing and securing the lid for safe transport and disposal.

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HOW DO NEEDLESTICK INJURIES OCCUR?

Syringes and other sharps may be improperly discarded in public areas. When sharps are not disposed of properly they may injure unsuspecting community members, particularly when they are difficult to see, such as in garden beds or bushes. It is important to avoid putting hands into dark or difficult to see spaces. Needlestick injuries can occur with unsafe handling and from accidental encounters.

WHAT TO DO IF I EXPERIENCE A NEEDLE-STICK INJURY?

Discarded syringe pose a risk of infection. After a syringe is used, some blood may remain inside the needle. Fortunately, most viruses exposed to air die within minutes or hours, and the risk of contracting an infection is rare. However, there is no way to know how long a syringe has been where you found it.

If you are poked, scratched or cut by a syringe or other sharp, follow these steps:

- Allow the wound to bleed freely
- Do not squeeze
- Wash with soap and water
- Visit your local emergency department immediately

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PLEASE CALL YOUR LOCAL COMMUNICABLE DISEASE UNIT FOR MORE INFORMATION

South Island: 1-866-665-6626

Central Island: 1-866-770-7798

North Island: 1-877-887-8835

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Click on underlined titles to go directly to the resource/s

BC Centre for Disease Control: Harm Reduction Best Practices - Safe Needle Disposal

BC Centre for Disease Control: Harm Reduction Best Practices - Community Needle Stick Injuries

Canadian Pediatric Society: Needle Stick Injuries in Community

Daniels Health: Safest Height for Wall-Mounted Sharps Containers

