

# Safe sharps disposal

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





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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 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 at [islandhealth.ca/safe-needle-disposal](https://islandhealth.ca/safe-needle-disposal):

- Safe disposal rack card
- Safe sharps disposal document
- How to dispose of a needle safely videos
- Return your rig posters
- [Map - needle disposal sites](#)

## What is harm reduction?

Did you use a seatbelt or bike helmet on your commute to work? You have used an approach called ‘harm reduction’ to reduce your risk of injury while travelling. Harm reduction includes policies, programs and practices that keep people safe and minimize injury. You may have heard the term ‘harm reduction’ in reference to alcohol and drug use. In this context, harm reduction significantly reduces infection, injury and death.

## Why are needles distributed?

The provincial needle distribution program helps improve health, keeps people safe from substance harms and increases referrals to treatment and services. Using a new needle each time reduces the transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C. For more information on communicable diseases, see <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>

## How are needles used?

Needles are used to transfer fluid into or out of the body and 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 are known as “sharps.” Everyone who uses needles needs accessible places to safely dispose of them.

## Who is responsible for collecting needles?

Collecting and safely disposing of needles is a shared responsibility between health-care services, community agencies, local government and people who use needles.

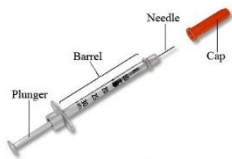
## Where are harm reduction supplies distributed?

The provincial needle distribution program policy was established in 2002, and in 2008, the province centralized distribution of harm reduction supplies. Supplies can be ordered from the BC Centre for Disease Control. A comprehensive list of harm reduction supply distribution sites in your area can be found on the provincial website, Toward the Heart: <http://towardtheheart.com/site-locator>

# Safe sharps disposal

## Safe sharps disposal pictures

The following images are of typical medical and harm reduction items that you may see in public areas. If desired, wear gloves before handling these materials.



needle / syringe

do not try to recap a  
needle



crystal meth pipe



lancet



0.5 L sharps container



stERICUP



1 L sharps container



sterile water



use a hard-sided plastic  
container to hold sharps



crack pipe / glass stem



community drop box

## Unsafe sharps disposal

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

## 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 injure unsuspecting community members, including adults, children, youth, public works employees, and pets.

**Questions?** Call your local Public Health Unit or the Communicable Disease Program (p.8). Visit [islandhealth.ca](http://islandhealth.ca) to find a health unit hear you.

## If you are injured by a needle

Discarded needles pose a risk of infection. After a needle is used, some blood may remain inside the needle. Fortunately, most viruses exposed to open air will die within minutes to hours, and the risk of [contracting an infection is rare](#)<sup>1</sup>. 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:

- Wash the injured area with soap and warm water as soon as possible
- Apply an antiseptic and a clean bandage
- Dispose of the needle safely
- Visit your local emergency department or doctor preferably within 24 hours for [follow up care](#)<sup>2</sup>.
- Call 8-1-1 for advice 24/7

**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

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<sup>1</sup> 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/>

<sup>2</sup> Blood and body fluid exposure management tool. BC Centre for Disease Control. Retrieved January 16, 2018 from [http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/CD%20Manual/Chapter%201%20-%20CDC/CPS\\_CDManual\\_BBFExpManage.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/CD%20Manual/Chapter%201%20-%20CDC/CPS_CDManual_BBFExpManage.pdf)

## How to dispose of a needle safely

- Stay calm
- Don't try to replace the cap on needles
- Don't snap, break or bend needles or other sharps
- Pick up needle with care – use work gloves if desired
- 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
- Wash hands with soap and water

## Where can I dispose of sharps?

Drop off the sealed container:

- Community drop box - call your municipality about locations in your area
- Participating pharmacy
- Dispose of the sealed container in a nearby waste bin
- Your [local public health unit](#)

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

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