

What Do I Tell My Patients?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently revised its recommendations on safe disposal of used needles. EPA now discourages patients from placing containers of used needles (syringes) in the household trash. This practice creates needle stick hazards for workers in the waste and other industries. The new EPA information (<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/other/medical/sharps.htm>) specifically states that patients should “ask your local health care provider or pharmacist if they offer disposal, or if they know of safe programs in the area.” Healthcare providers are well positioned to educate patients on safe needle disposal. Some health care facilities, especially those with services dedicated to patients with diabetes, also offer disposal to their patients.

SafeNeedleDisposal.Org

Coalition for Safe
Community Needle Disposal

1 800 643 1643

KNOW YOUR PATIENTS – ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

“How long will you be injecting this medication, short-term or long-term?”

Short-Term. Some patients inject for a short period of time (infertility, allergy and interferon treatments) and often the best solution for this group is a onetime sharps mail back program.

Long-Term. Other patients may be injecting daily over an indefinite period of time for diseases such as diabetes, arthritis or HIV. In this case, cost may be a factor in proper disposal. While needle destruction devices may be high in the initial cost, over time they could prove to be the most cost effective. A needle clipper is usually inexpensive and can collect hundreds of needles, however, the patient will also need to purchase a sharps container (mail back – possibly) to properly dispose of the needles when it is full.

“How do you plan to dispose of your used needles?”

Public Health Concern. If your patient is injecting for a highly infectious disease such as HIV, Hepatitis B, or Hepatitis C insist that your patient use one of the many safe disposal options. Again any of the programs will work, but help the patient to understand how imperative it is to the community that they use or purchase a program that provides safe disposal for their used needles.

“What factors are most important to you in safe needle disposal?”

Understand Your Patient. Is disposal cost a concern? Is anonymity a concern? Is convenience a concern? Mail backs and destruction devices provide both anonymity and convenience, while community drop-off programs and household hazardous waste programs are inexpensive (often free) but don’t always offer the convenience or anonymity some patients desire. Research your community – find out if the household hazardous waste program (collection site for used paint and oil) will accept used needles. Does your local hospital or community health clinic accept used needles? Call the local medical waste processor in your community and find out if it will accept used needles from individuals, if so, at what cost and what type of container is acceptable. Knowing this information can help you help your patient transition into safe disposal.

“Do you need more information?”

Safe Disposal Resource. The Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal is a collaboration of businesses, community groups, non-profit organizations and local, state and federal government entities that promotes public awareness and solutions for the safe disposal of needles, syringes and other sharps in the community. For more information on safe needle disposal contact the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal at 800-643-1643 or www.safeneedledisposal.org. The Coalition website offers disposal solutions for individuals by zip code.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE – HOW DO I HELP MY PATIENTS?

- **Work Together.** Changing behavior isn't easy. It will take the efforts of everyone involved to ultimately change the way people dispose of their used needles at home. Work with other health care providers (doctors, nurses, educators, pharmacists, hospital administrators) and public health officials and waste officials to determine what disposal solutions may work best for your community.
- **Promote Local Needle Disposal Programs.** If you are aware of programs in your community for safe needle disposal share information about those programs with your patients.
- **Research Disposal Program Availability.** If you are not aware of programs in your community contact your local solid waste department (city or county government pages in your phonebook) to determine if there are drop-off programs such as household hazardous waste programs that accept used needles at these facilities. In addition, the CDC has a special website that identifies at-home needle disposal regulations for each state. This is a good place to get started if you are trying to determine what is available in your community (<http://www.cdc.gov/needledisposal>).
- **Be a Community Leader.** Work with other health care providers (doctors, nurses, educators, public health officials) and develop a community-based program for your community. Don't re-invent the wheel; contact the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal at 800-643-1643 for help or ideas on getting a program started in your community.
- **Know Your Patients.** Understand that many patients who use syringes to treat medical conditions already face significant economic challenges due to these conditions. Work with appropriate groups and individuals in the community and/or state to make safe disposal programs free when possible.
- **Recommend Products.** If there are no programs available encourage patients to purchase one of the disposal options currently available on the market. In addition, the Coalition (www.safeneedledisposal.org) features disposal solutions on its website. This lists some current products available on the market and will link patients directly to the vendor of the product.
 - a. Mail back programs are abundant and vary in cost depending on the size (\$20-\$50). Listed are some products currently on the market:

Becton, Dickinson and Company – 877-927-8363 or www.bd.com
Sharps Compliance, Inc. – 800-772-5657 www.sharpsinc.com
 - b. At-home needle destruction devices. Many of the products on the market sever, burn or melt the needle and the patient can throw the syringe or plunger in the garbage. The cost of these items vary (\$8 - \$180). Listed are some products currently on the market:

BD – Needle Clipper (clips the needle into a small container) www.bd.com

Agencies and businesses working on this issue include: American Association of Diabetes Educators, American Diabetes Association, American Medical Association, American Pharmacists Association, National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors, National Association of Chain Drug Stores, National Association of County and City Health Officials, National Association for Home Care and Hospice, National Recycling Coalition, National Solid Wastes Management Association, U.S. Conference of Mayors, Waste Management, Sharps Compliance, and Becton, Dickinson and Co.