

Frequently Asked Questions – California

1. What are “sharps”?

“Sharps” is a medical term for devices with sharp points or edges that can puncture or cut skin. Examples of sharps include:

- **Needle** – a very fine, slender, hollow piece of metal used to inject medication under the skin.
- **Syringe** – a device which a needle is attached to in order to inject medication into or withdraw fluid from the body.
- **Lancet** – also called a “finger-stick,” an instrument with a short, two-edged blade used to get drops of blood for testing. Lancets are commonly used in the treatment of diabetes.
- **Auto injector** – including epinephrine pens – a syringe pre-filled with medication designed to be self-injected into the body.
- **Infusion set** – tubing system with a needle used to deliver drugs to the body.
- **Connection needle/set** – needle that connects to a tube used to transfer fluids in and out of the body. This is generally used for patients on home hemodialysis.

2. Why is safe sharps disposal important?

Each year approximately 9 million sharps users will administer at least 3 billion injections outside healthcare facilities. Sharps that are not disposed of safely may cause injury.

3. Should I put my used sharps in a container before I get rid of them?

Yes. Used sharps—including those that retract after use or are very small—should ALWAYS be placed in a strong, plastic container that’s sealed before the container is disposed.

4. What do I do with my sharps container once it’s sealed?

Residents must take sealed containers to a drop-off site or arrange a mail-back service. Visit [SafeNeedleDisposal.org](https://www.safeneedledisposal.org) for local information. Use the ZIP Code search or click your state to learn about various disposal options.

5. What should I do to dispose of used sharps if I live or work or am traveling to an area that does not let me place them in the household trash?

If local regulations do not allow a used sharps container to be disposed of in the household trash, [SafeNeedleDisposal.org](https://www.safeneedledisposal.org) will provide information on alternatives. Options may include taking used sharps to a drop-off site, to a hazardous waste collection site, or participating in a mail-back program.

6. Can used sharps—or used sharps containers—be put in the recycling?

No. Used sharps can NEVER be recycled—either on their own or sealed in a strong, plastic container.

7. If I use a needle clipper or destroyer to remove the needle from a syringe, can I throw the syringe in my household trash?

Yes, once you have safely removed the needle from the syringe, the remaining plastic piece can be placed directly in your household trash.

8. Can I put lancets, or sharps that retract, directly in the trash?

No. Lancets and sharps that retract should be placed in a strong, plastic container prior to disposal, just like any sharps.

9. Where can I find more information on sharps disposal?

For more information, visit [SafeNeedleDisposal.org](https://www.safeneedledisposal.org). [SafeNeedleDisposal.org](https://www.safeneedledisposal.org) is a project of NeedyMeds, a national 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that provides healthcare information to consumers. In addition to information on local guidance and disposal facilities, the website offers a wealth of information, including discussion on the types of sharps, types of container options available to sharps users, and various take back and collection programs available.

