

# Disposal of Your Medical Waste

## Introduction

Medical waste includes medications, disposable products, and items that may contain body fluids such as blood, urine, and other secretions. This guide is designed to help you dispose of medical waste safely and in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Disposal regulations vary by state or county. Always follow the most stringent requirement applicable to your location. For additional information, contact your pharmacy, State Department of Health, or your healthcare or nursing provider.

## Why Proper Disposal Matters

Proper disposal helps:

- Prevent accidental injury to patients, caregivers, and sanitation workers.
- Protect the environment from hazardous substances.
- Reduce risk of infection and contamination.

## Disposal of “Sharps”

- “Sharps” refers to needles, syringes, or other sharp objects that can puncture the skin. These may also include “spikes” at the top of intravenous tubing.
- Always dispose of all used needles or spikes in the sharps container provided. Any sharp item exposed to blood or other body fluids must be placed in this container.
- Tubing “spikes” used to infuse medications but not exposed to body fluids may be disposed of with other medical waste.
- Replace your sharps container before it becomes full to prevent accidental injury. Notify your pharmacy when the container is one-half to two-thirds full.

## Disposal of Infusion Supplies

- Disposable supplies used with your medication therapy that have not been exposed to body fluids, including blood, may be disposed of with household garbage.

- If supplies have been exposed to blood or other body fluids, they may require disposal in a special bag or box. Consult your nursing provider for specific instructions.

### Disposal of Medications

- Follow instructions from your pharmacy for disposing of unused medications.
- Do not flush medications unless they are on the FDA flush list.
- Most medications should be mixed with an undesirable substance, sealed in a container, and discarded according to your local rules.
- Refrigerated medications should not be poured down sinks or toilets and may require special handling. Contact your pharmacy for instructions.
- Typically, unused medications are not collected by your pharmacy. Patients are responsible for disposal at home in accordance with local regulations. For guidance, contact your pharmacy, State Department of Health, or healthcare provider.
- Remove or cover your personal information on medication labels before discarding containers.
- Contact your local waste authority to see if they offer medication take-back programs or household hazardous waste collection.
- For additional information, visit the FDA's Safe Disposal of Medicines page:  
<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines>

### Disposal of Chemotherapy Waste

- If you are receiving chemotherapy at home, dispose of medical supplies carefully. Many chemotherapy drugs are hazardous to the environment and can cause harm if they contact skin. Wear gloves when handling or disposing of these medications.
- Follow your nurse's and pharmacist's instructions for using chemotherapy (cytotoxic) sharps containers and disposal bags.
- Keep all unused chemotherapy medications and supplies out of reach of children and pets.
- Your nursing provider may provide specific instructions for handling household items such as linens, eating utensils, bedpans, urinals, and emesis basins.

#### Safe Storage Before Disposal

- Keep all medical waste in secure containers away from children and pets until disposal.
- Do not overfill containers. Seal them properly before discarding.

#### Emergency Situations

If your sharps container becomes full and you do not have a replacement:

- Place sharps in a heavy-duty plastic container with a secure lid (e.g., detergent bottle) until you can obtain a new sharps container.
- Label the container clearly as “Sharps – Do Not Recycle”.

#### Compliance Disclaimer

This guidance is intended to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations. It does not replace official requirements. Patients should consult state and local health authorities for specific disposal guidelines.

#### Resources for State-Specific Requirements

- State Department of Health
- EPA Household Medical Waste Guidance:
  - <https://www.epa.gov/rcra/medical-waste>

#### Special Medical Waste Disposal Instructions

If your pharmacy has special medical waste disposal instructions, they are included below: