

## Health and Safety: Proper Needle Disposal

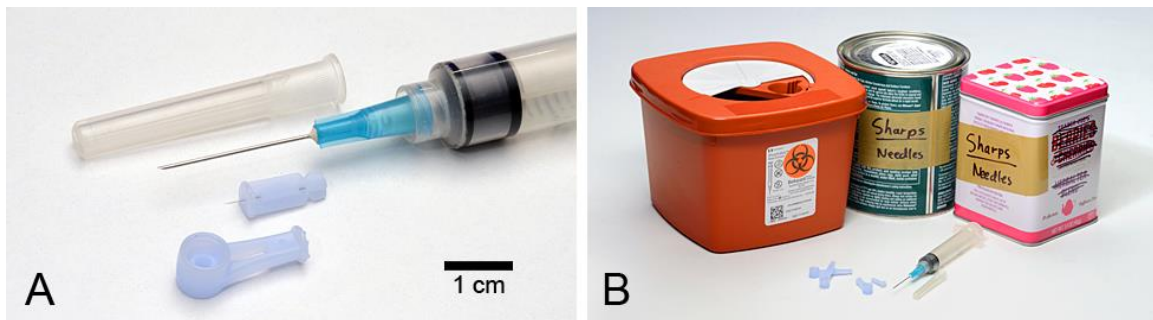
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When using needles, including for legitimate medical reasons such as diabetes monitoring, please properly discard those objects in a sturdy metal or plastic container that prevents the sharps from poking through or breaking into the environment. We recently had an incident involving one of the volunteers who helps the community by routinely picking up litter from the street. This person (who wishes to remain anonymous) saw what he or she thought were plastic screw caps but they were in fact diabetic needles. The volunteer did not see the fine needle until after feeling the sharp poke, and even then he or she was not sure what it was. The person living at the nearby house happened to drive home and said that they were his/her diabetic needles. While the resident said that he/she was free of blood-borne pathogens, the startled volunteer still got checked out at an emergency medical facility after consulting with the doctor's office. This potential exposure incident happened to an adult; children coming into contact with these objects are also unlikely to know what they are and might not report it to their parents. Furthermore, there is more litter in the street on garbage pickup days ever since trash trucks started using automatic loaders, which drop more loose refuse into the street than the manual methods. This incident was extremely stressful to the volunteer, who tried to do a good deed and instead ended up with a medical bill for the ER visit. The best way to pick up needles in the environment is with tongs that can later be cleaned and sterilized.

The best way to dispose of needles is to store them in a puncture-resistant, spill-proof container, such as the ones pictured in Figure 1B. If the vessel is a recycled metal or hard plastic container, deface the original label and place a new one stating the contents. Plastic bags are unacceptable because the needles can spill out or puncture through the walls. Load the container to three-fourths full and secure the container with duct tape. In Virginia, sealed sharps containers may be discarded with household trash. A better option is to bring the filled sharps container back to the clinic where technicians will properly autoclave and sterilize the objects prior to sending them off. Thank you for your help and cooperation.

More information is at:

[https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Land/Guidance/Household\\_Sharps\\_Flyer.pdf](https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Land/Guidance/Household_Sharps_Flyer.pdf)



**Figure 1. Diabetic needles and lancets (A, bottom) are much finer than standard hypodermic needles (top). Needles and other used sharps should be placed in a hard, labeled container (B) prior to disposal.**

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