

# Waste and Sharps Handling in Community-based Services

## General waste

General waste from healthcare settings is no more hazardous than general household waste. General waste does not require special disposal methods. Examples of general waste in healthcare settings include cotton balls, gauze, dressings, gloves, disposable gowns, tissues, disposable needle-guided tubes, alcohol wipes, Band-Aids and Intrauterine Devices (IUDs).

- Handle waste as little as possible.
- Make a container available at each workstation; ensure it is not easily accessible by young children, pets or confused individuals.
- Line waste containers with a plastic bag.
- Double bag only if the integrity of the bag is compromised or the outside is visibly soiled.
- Clean waste containers inside and out regularly, and when visibly soiled.
- Pick up or arrange for pick up regularly. If waste pick up is delayed, do not place garbage in hallways or common traffic areas.
- Use hands-free garbage containers.
- Empty when  $\frac{3}{4}$  full.

## Biomedical waste

Biomedical waste can be classified as one of the following:

- **Contaminated sharps** – needles, lancets, staple removers, cord clamps, syringes, blades and other glass that has come in contact with blood, body fluids or microorganisms. It does not include unused drug vials and ampoules.
- **Human blood or body fluids** – fluid blood and blood products. It does not include saliva, urine, feces, vomit or tears (these are considered general waste).
- **Cytotoxic material**
- **Human anatomical waste** – human tissue, organs and body parts. It does not include teeth, hair and nails (these are considered general waste).
- **Animal waste** – animal tissue, organs, and body parts (most often associated with research laboratories)
- **Laboratory waste**

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For AHS staff, AHS biomedical waste disposal protocols provide more information.



For non-AHS staff, please contact your manager.

*It is important to note that reusable linen saturated or dripping with blood and/or body fluids may be placed into soiled linen bags for laundering.*

### Special considerations for safe handling of sharps

#### Staff

- Carry a small sharps container in vehicle at all times. Be prepared.
- Ensure containers are safely placed in the client's home, mobile clinic or other settings. When placing sharps container, be mindful of children, confused individuals, people who use intravenous drugs, etc.
- Close used sharps containers for transport to prevent sharps falling out. Transport sharps container upright, out of eyesight, in a designated dirty area in your vehicle.
- Do not keep sharps container near clean supplies.
- Dispose of sharps containers when  $\frac{3}{4}$  full or when sharps reach the indicated line on the bin.
- Place sharps containers into a large sharps disposal bin in a dirty utility area away from public access.

#### Clients

- Teach clients, family members, friends or other caregivers in the home the correct procedures for safe handling and disposal of sharps and sharp containers.
- Ensure home storage of sharps is in a labelled, puncture-proof container with a tight fitting lid that prevents leakage.
- Disposal of client sharps:
  - Pharmacies, fire halls or local waste drop-off facility, such as an Eco station, can provide information on sharps disposal.
  - Each community has unique guidelines for disposal of sharps; please refer to your local bylaws.

Refer to the [AHS Single Use Policy](#) and [Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Code](#) for additional information.