

Personal sharps containers: Questions and Answers

What is a personal sharps container?

Sharps containers are a safe place to dispose of used injection and inhalation materials that can spread infection. Sharps containers are made of hard plastic that needles and glass cannot penetrate thus the likelihood of injuries from used needles and broken crack stems is reduced. Appropriate labeling on the containers helps to ensure that the unit is disposed of properly. While sharps containers can be found in a variety of sizes, personal sharps containers are sized to fit a reasonable number of needles and/or stems while still being convenient enough to carry around.

Why should a personal sharps container be used?

A personal sharps container is a safe and convenient means of discarding used needles and crack stems. When used needles and stems are kept on the body or disposed of improperly, there is the danger of unintentional injuries which can lead to the transmission of bloodborne illnesses including Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV.

Improper discarding of used injection and inhalation materials in the community is often perceived to be a risk by the public.^{1,2} People who use drugs do not intend to cause harm, but they are not always able to dispose of used materials appropriately. A personal sharps container offers a method of quick disposal immediately after injection or stem breakage, minimizing the possibility of disease transmission.

What types of personal sharps containers does BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services provide?

Personal sharps containers will be offered in two sizes: 500mL and 1L. The 500mL size is appropriate for purses and pockets, while the 1L size can be used in backpacks or at home.



500mL



1L



Why does BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services provide personal sharps containers?

Providing a simple and transportable method of disposal is an effective way to reduce the spread of bloodborne infections. Personal sharps containers will not replace disposal services provided at harm reduction supply distribution sites or sharps boxes on the street, but will increase the comprehensiveness of disposal services. Full sharps containers can be returned to distribution sites, or can be sealed tightly and placed in the regular garbage for disposal.

Providing supplies for safer use and disposal to people who use drugs creates a way to engage hard-to-reach and under-serviced populations in health care and social services. No studies have found that providing safe supplies makes people more likely to engage in harmful drug use.

How can personal sharps containers be ordered?

Sharps containers can be ordered by harm reduction distribution sites which are approved by the appropriate regional health authority. The harm reduction supply requisition form available on-line at <http://www.bccdc.ca/default.htm> should be used and the containers ordered at the same time as other harm reduction supplies. The completed form is faxed to BCCDC.

References

*See *Health File #102a: Understanding Harm Reduction* in the BC Health Guide for a definition of harm reduction: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile102a.stm>

1. Nyiri P, Leung T, and Zuckerman MA. Sharps discarded in inner city parks and playgrounds – risk of bloodborne virus exposure. *Commun Dis Public Health*, 2004; 7(4): 287-8.
2. Libois A, Fumero E, Castro P, Nomdedeu M, Cruceta A, Gatell JM, and Garcia F. Transmission of hepatitis C virus by discarded-needle injury. *Clin Infect Dis*, 2005; 41(1):129-30.