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Medical Waste Disposal

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Medical waste is waste that is generated by hospital or clinic laboratories or as the result of surgeries, autopsies, or other medical procedures. Medical waste can also be generated at home, as described below. No matter where it is generated, medical waste may have the potential to transmit disease to other people.

What medical wastes should I be concerned about?

Certain medical or biohazard wastes can be classified as pathogenic (potentially disease carrying) and/or infectious (potential to transmit disease to other people). Also, “sharps,” such as used hypodermic needles, may present a physical hazard as well as a disease hazard to people accidentally exposed. Pathogenic or infectious waste may include blood and other bodily fluids (including blood-soaked bandages or items), tissues such as organs or biopsy samples, home dialysis equipment, or hypodermic needles used for the treatment of diabetes or other diseases. Hospitals, clinics, veterinarians, and home health providers are responsible for properly treating and disposing of pathogenic and infectious waste, and sharps. Your health care provider should be properly trained to protect themselves, you, and waste management workers from the potential hazards in dealing with medical waste. Currently, most medical waste is treated by sterilization in high-temperature autoclaves before disposal at municipal landfills.

What are my options if I generate medical wastes at home?

If you are generating potential biohazard wastes at home, you need to know your options for disposal. Potential medical wastes generated at home may include:

- ❖ Used hypodermic needles (sharps) from the injection of insulin or other prescribed drugs.
- ❖ Home kidney dialysis filters, bags, and equipment.
- ❖ Automatic lancets used for blood sampling.
- ❖ Blood soaked bandages, compresses, etc. particularly if a person knowingly carries a blood-borne disease. Band-aids with dried blood may be disposed of as regular waste.

For some wastes, your health care provider will collect waste from your home on their regularly scheduled visits. Examples of this are dialysis wastes that your servicing dialysis or kidney center will pick up. If you have a home health nurse they may also take care of medical waste as part of their service. Make sure to talk to your health provider to ensure that they are providing this service.

If you are managing your diabetes yourself, or other health issues, and having to deal with sharps or other medical waste, you should contact your local medical waste service provider or clinic for disposal options. In most cases, they will meet you to pick up wastes, or you may drop off medical waste at their facility, often free of charge. If you cannot afford a sharps container designed for the purpose, they can advise you on cheaper alternatives that will provide protection for you and waste handlers. Examples may be: one-liter soda bottles, one gallon orange juice containers, or coffee cans with sealing lids. You may contact the medical waste service provider, or your local health clinic or hospital, in your area for more information.

If you do not have access to a medical waste service provider or clinic that is able to treat medical waste that you generate at home, you should protect yourself, your family, and others such as waste collection and landfill workers by placing your sharps or other potentially infectious waste in puncture-resistant containers like those listed above. Other good options are plastic laundry detergent containers. Containers will keep the waste away from others and protect others from accidental needle punctures.