

REDUCING INFECTIONS WITH SAFE DISPOSAL OF HOME-GENERATED SHARPS

Developing and promoting guidelines to reduce the risk of needle stick injuries

Public Health Problem

- Most syringes and sharps used by people at home for injection of diabetes medication and other medical uses are discarded in everyday household trash and community solid waste, putting workers and the public at risk of needle stick injuries and possibly life threatening infections. Sharps are objects that can penetrate the skin including needles and lancets.
- Options for safe syringe and sharps disposal in the community are often limited and most people who give themselves injections have received little or poor guidance on safe disposal of used sharps. Healthcare providers may be uncertain about how to advise patients.
- The State of Indiana has no regulation or law on syringe disposal for home-generated sharps and county agencies varied in offering their own guidelines or no guidelines at all.

Program

- The Indiana Diabetes Prevention and Control Program, the Indiana State Diabetes Advisory Council, and other agencies developed recommendations on proper home disposal through a Syringe Disposal Task Force made up of representatives of public and private interests, including local health departments, solid waste management districts, and pharmaceutical companies. [www.in.gov/isdh/files/NeedleDisposal.pdf]
- The Diabetes Prevention and Control Program provided mini-grants to eight local health departments and solid waste management districts with syringe disposal programs for enhancements to or maintenance of their programs. The funds provided for outreach, education, and provision of disposal containers. The Program also distributed brochures on proper syringe disposal and provided educational materials on diabetes and proper syringe disposal of needles and lancets at solid waste management conferences.

Impact

As a result of the Syringe Disposal Task Force work and its recommendations:

- Four communities began safe-disposal programs
- One of the first county programs reported a noticeable drop in needle stick injuries to employees of the trash removal service since implementing their syringe disposal program.
- Counties have increased the number of sharps removed from the solid waste stream by increasing participation rates in county disposal programs.
- The Indiana Diabetes Prevention and Control Program is a member of the Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force which advocates for safe-disposal programs.
- Trash removal companies and other Indiana counties are increasingly supportive of this effort to improve public health by removing sharps from the household waste stream.
- The Indiana Diabetes Prevention and Control Program will again offer mini-grants to continue enhancing initiatives related to safe syringe and sharps disposal.

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