



Safe Needle Disposal Guide

A clean and safe Prince George is a shared responsibility.



northern health
the northern way of caring



**CITY OF
PRINCE GEORGE**

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This toolkit was adapted with permission from the City of Edmonton’s Capital City Clean Up program.

Introduction

The Safe Needle Disposal Guide provides important information on safe needle disposal practices.

Needles and needle debris are a challenging issue for the community of Prince George. Needles are used by people with specific health conditions, including people with specific addictions. Ensuring that people who use needles can access safe disposal, and that stray needles and needle debris in the community are dealt with promptly and safely is one of the goals of this guide. This guide outlines best practices for the safe disposal of needles in order to help protect the health and safety of all citizens of Prince George.

Why are needles sometimes discarded?

People use needles for many different purposes. For example:

- People with diabetes may use needles to inject insulin.
- People with cancer, arthritis, or other painful conditions may inject drugs for pain control.
- Some people inject drugs because they have an addiction.

Everyone who uses needles needs a way to dispose of them safely after they are finished using them. Nobody intends to harm others by discarding their needles, but sometimes people put needles in the garbage or on the ground if they don't see an easy way to get rid of them safely. Needles are more likely to be disposed of safely when safe options are easily available.

This guide aims to:

1. Raise community awareness about needle safety.
2. Reduce the number of discarded needles on our streets.
3. Reduce the risk and prevent injury to the public, especially children, who find discarded needles.
4. Provide options for safe disposal of needles where the need exists.



What should I do if I find a discarded needle?

Children...

You should leave the needle where it is. Call an adult for help.

Adults...

If you see a needle, and you have appropriate equipment to handle it safely, you can pick it up so that a child does not get injured or poked. You can pick the needle up carefully by following these four steps or you can call for help (see below). You don't need to be afraid if you're cautious.



1. Use a pair of tongs or pliers to pick up the needle by the barrel or with a gloved hand.
2. Grasp the needle by the plastic barrel, at the opposite end from the needle tip. Point the needle tip down and away from yourself. **IMPORTANT: Do not try to put the cap back on the needle.**
3. Put the needle in a strong plastic container, on a stable surface, and tape the lid tightly closed (with duct tape, if you have it). Bleach bottles are good because they have a small opening and a screw-on lid. A thick plastic peanut butter jar will work. You shouldn't use a glass jar or light plastic or a milk carton. Glass can break and needles easily poke through light plastic or milk cartons. Take the sealed container to **Northern Health's Harm Reduction Clinic** at 1108 Third Avenue, or to a pharmacy that accepts needles. Note that most pharmacies only accept needles returned by their own customers.
4. Or, if you see a blue needle drop box nearby, you can place the needle into the drop box instead of in a plastic container. The **City of Prince George** has installed safe needle drop boxes in a number of locations throughout the community (see page 4 for a map of locations). They have been painted blue for easy identification and are regularly emptied by City staff.

Or...

If you are not comfortable picking up the needle or need more information call the City of Prince George at 250-561-7600, or complete the online "I Want to Report a Needle" form at www.princegeorge.ca

When should I call for help?

- If you are too nervous to pick it up.
- If you see many needles in a pile.
- If you see needles broken into multiple pieces.
- If you have no way of taking the needle in a strong plastic container to a safe place.

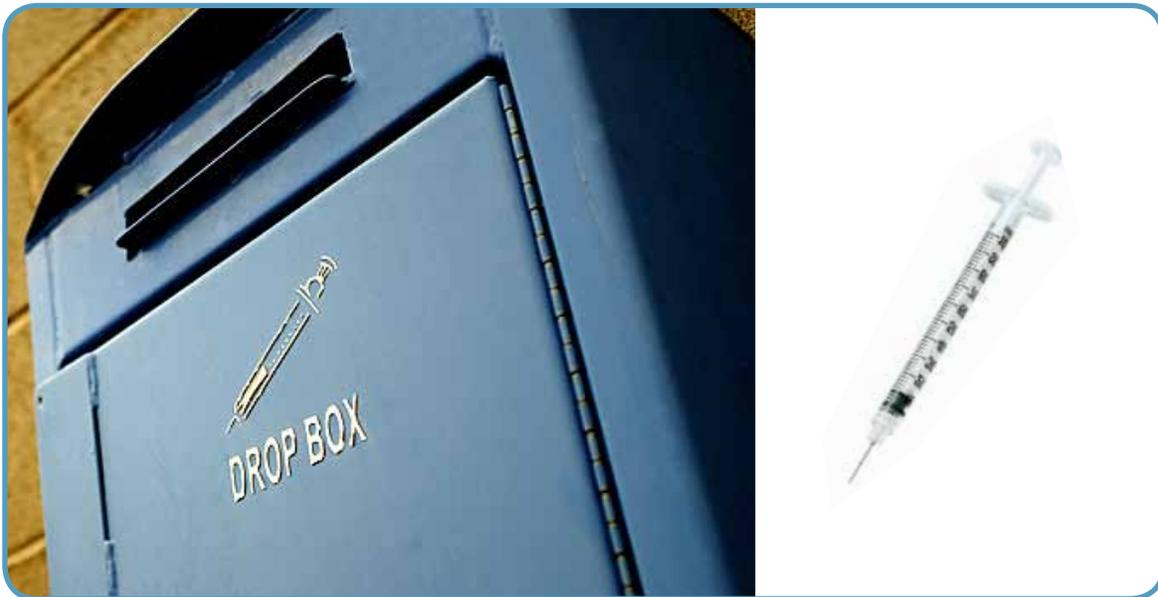
Where can needle clean-up supplies be obtained?

- Tongs and gloves can be purchased at a variety of local stores (i.e. dollar stores sell inexpensive tongs).
- Northern Health's Harm Reduction Clinic at 1108 Third Avenue supplies sharps containers to people who regularly use needles. Sharps containers are also available from some pharmacies.
- Or you may choose to collect needles in a strong plastic container, such as empty bleach bottles, plastic pop containers that have a tightly fitting screw on lid.

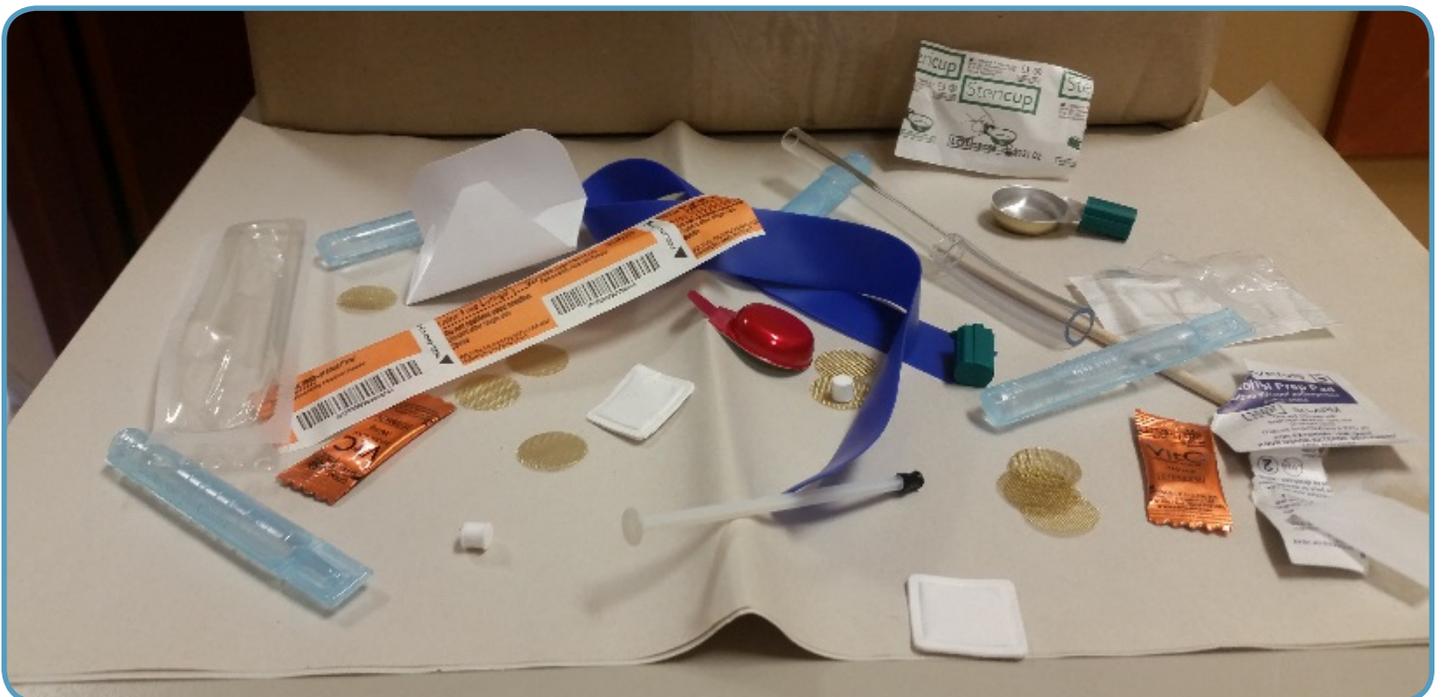
I keep finding needles discarded in the same location. What can I do?

It may help to have a new drop box installed in this location, which will make it easier for people to dispose of needles safely.

If your business would like to have an outdoor safe needle drop box installed nearby, please call the City of Prince George at 250-561-7600 to discuss the steps you can take.



Drop boxes are only for needle disposal.



These items are NOT sharps and can be safely disposed of in the garbage.

Locations of Blue Safe Needle Drop Boxes



I use needles regularly. What should I do with them?

1**Do not try to recap your needles**

*(Exception: if no safe container is immediately available to dispose of the needle, you can carefully recap **your own** needle, in order to protect others.)*

**2****Carefully place your needles in a safe container**

Packaging and other non-sharp material should be placed in regular garbage bins, not sharps containers.

The best choice is a sharps container. You can generally get sharps containers in the same place where you get your needles, such as your pharmacy, or at Northern Health's Harm Reduction Clinic at 1108 Third Avenue.

**OR**

If you do not have a sharps container, collect your needles in a strong plastic container with a screw on lid. The best choice is a hard plastic container with a narrow opening, such as a bleach bottle.

**3**

When the container is 2/3 full, seal it completely shut with tape, and label it.

4

Take the sealed container to your pharmacy, or to Northern Health's Harm Reduction Clinic at 1108 Third Avenue.

What risks are associated with discarded needles?

Unsafe ways to dispose of needles	Why is it unsafe?
<p>X Putting needles in the garbage.</p>	<p>Waste collectors can get poked if the needles are loose or in a container. Containers can get crushed and the needles come through.</p>
<p>X Putting needles in the recycling bag or blue bin.</p>	<p>Waste Management workers sort all the recycled items we put in blue bags by hand. A worker could get poked by a needle.</p>
<p>X Putting needles down the toilet. Putting needles down the sewer.</p>	<p>The needles go into the sewer system and then into the river. People or animals could get poked and it is environmentally unclean.</p>
<p>X Putting needles on the ground or under a bush.</p>	<p>A child, adult or pet could get scratched or poked.</p>
<p>X Tucking needles into places they won't be seen.</p>	<p>A person cleaning, such as a janitor or housekeeping staff, could get hurt.</p>



A PERSON WHO HANDLES GARBAGE CAN GET POKED IF SOMEONE HAS TOSSED A NEEDLE IN THE BIN

Can I get an infection from a discarded needle?



The vast majority of people who get poked by a used needle do not get sick, because most viruses die within minutes to hours after being exposed to the open air. But since there is no way to know how recently the needle was discarded, it is best to be cautious.

If you get poked with the needle tip, or the needle touches part of your skin that is already open (cut or scraped), it may be possible to get an infection, particularly if there is fresh blood on the needle.

The main infections that can be spread by used needles are hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). These viruses are spread from the blood or body fluids of one person who has hepatitis to the blood or body fluids of another person.

What are Hepatitis B and C?

Hepatitis is a disease of the liver, caused by a virus.

- You may get hepatitis if you share needles or other injection equipment.
- You may get the disease if you get poked by a needle with infected blood on it.
- You may get the disease if you have sex with someone who is infected.

You can prevent getting or passing Hepatitis B & C to someone else by:

- Getting the hepatitis B vaccine.
- Practicing safer sex by using a condom.
- Only using clean needles.
- Disposing of used needles safely.

What are HIV and AIDS?

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that weakens the immune system. When the disease reaches an advanced stage where the immune system is badly damaged, we call this Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

- HIV is spread through blood, by having unprotected sex.
- HIV is spread by sharing needles and injection equipment.

HIV cannot be cured, but it can be treated with medication, so that a person's immune system can remain healthy for their entire life.

You can greatly reduce the risk of getting or spreading HIV:

- If you practice safer sex, using a condom.
- If you use clean needles every time.
- If you dispose of used needles safely.

What should I do if I get poked by a needle?

- Do not squeeze the wound to make it bleed more. This may damage the tissues and make it easier for an infection to enter the body.
- Wash well with soap and warm water.
- Go directly to the local emergency room for assessment.



Safe Needle Disposal

A clean and safe Prince George is a shared responsibility

1

Do not try to put the cap back on the needle, snap, remove, or bend needles.



2

Pick the needle up carefully with tongs or pliers. Ensure the needle tip is pointing down and away from you.



3

If there is a blue drop box nearby, place the needle in the drop box.

Otherwise, put the needle in a hard plastic container, tightly seal and label it.



4

Take the plastic container to:

Northern Health at
1108 Third Avenue.

OR

A pharmacy that
accepts needles.

