



# Safe Needle Disposal Toolkit

V I C T O R I A   B C   C A N A D A





The Clean and Safe Committee is a group of organizations who collaborate to identify and pursue improvements to the health and safety of our communities.

Members of the Clean and Safe Committee:

AIDS Vancouver Island  
City of Victoria  
Downtown Residents Association  
Downtown Service Providers Committee  
Downtown Victoria Business Association  
Victoria AIDS Resource and Community Services Society  
Victoria Police Department  
Victoria Cool Aid Society

This document is available for download  
at [www.avi.org/needletoolkit](http://www.avi.org/needletoolkit)

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in the SafeEdmonton Safe Needle Disposal Toolkit  
– many thanks to them for their amazing groundwork  
in creating safer communities.

Please visit [www.edmonton.ca/Safedmonton](http://www.edmonton.ca/Safedmonton) for more  
information on their projects.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION OR COPIES  
OF THIS BOOKLET, PLEASE CONTACT:

AIDS Vancouver Island  
(250) 384-2366

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**CENTREFOLD**  
PULL-OUT SAFE DISPOSAL POSTER

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## Needle use in Victoria

- People use needles for many different purposes. There are many medical conditions that involve the use of needles. Diabetes is the most common. People with conditions like cancer and arthritis use needles to control pain. Some people use needles to inject illicit drugs.
- People who use injection drugs have said they do not intend to harm other people in the community when they are discarding used needles. Many will throw out needles safely if there are safe choices available.
- Everyone who uses needles has the same need to get rid of their used needles safely. With safe disposal, no one gets hurt accidentally.



## Choices for disposing needles

- Many pharmacies take back needles from their customers.
- AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI), the Victoria AIDS Resource Community Service Society (VARCS) and SOLID offer free needle exchange services for injection drug users. People injecting drugs can exchange their used needles for clean ones to reduce harm to their health. Over 800,000 needles are exchanged through these services each year.
- The City of Victoria has organized placing and managing needle disposal boxes in the downtown area. Safe needle boxes have been installed outside where needles have been found on the ground and where they are a safety concern for the community.
- The Victoria Police Department supports the safe needle boxes as one way to make communities safer.
- Disposed needles collected by AVI, VARCS and the City of Victoria's needle drop boxes are sent to an incineration facility for safe disposal.



## A glossary in pictures

The syringes and needles used at home or by injection drug users look the same as the syringe and needle you see in a doctor's office. Needles are also called "sharps" and syringes, needles and lancets are known as "needle debris."

### *WHAT DOES A LANCET LOOK LIKE?*

People with diabetes use a lancet - a very small needle - to prick their finger to draw a small amount of blood. They do this several times each week to check the level of sugar in their blood. The needle sits inside a holder, or lancing device.



### *WHAT ARE THOSE BLUE PLASTIC VIALS?*

Sterile water may be used in the preparation of injection drugs and come in small blue or clear plastic vials.

### *WHAT DOES A CRACK PIPE LOOK LIKE?*

Increasingly, people in Victoria are also finding crack pipes on the street. Crack pipes should be treated the same as needle debris and disposed of in a safe manner.



## WHAT DOES A NEEDLE CLIP DEVICE LOOK LIKE?

A needle clip device is used by diabetics to clip the needles they use to inject insulin. Its opening is only large enough for a needle to fit through. The sides push together to clip the needle from the syringe. The purpose is to seal the needles in a container so that no one else gets accidentally poked.



## WHAT DOES A NEEDLE DISPOSAL BOX LOOK LIKE?

These boxes are used for collecting used needles. Needle boxes are installed and managed by the City of Victoria's Engineering Department.



## WHAT IS A SHARPS CONTAINER?

A sharps container is made of hard plastic with a sealable opening at the top. It is especially made for safely holding used needles, syringes and lancets. Sharps containers, or "biohazard containers", come in various sizes and can hold a large number of needles. You can buy a sharps container at a pharmacy. If you are a business operating in downtown Victoria, call the Downtown Victoria Business Association (250-386-2238) and ask their Clean Team to drop one off for you.



## Who can get poked accidentally?

People using needles need a way to throw them out after they are finished using them. Without wanting to harm anyone else, they may throw the needles in the garbage or on the ground if they don't see an easy way to get rid of them safely or if they have not been educated about safe disposal.

### HOW COULD A PERSON GET HURT?

- A person who tries to put the cap back on a needle can easily get poked.
- A curious child in a playground can pick up a needle tucked under a bush and get poked.
- A person looking through garbage for pop cans and empty bottles can get poked if someone tossed a needle in the bin.
- A parks maintenance person can get poked if there are needles hidden in a flowerbed or under a shrub in a park.
- A person who picks up a needle while walking along the street or an alley can get poked if it is not handled properly. Carrying loose needles without a container could lead to an accidental injury.
- A worker who is cleaning public washrooms or hotel rooms can get poked if needles are hidden in tissue or waste baskets.
- A child attracted to something shiny or an adult reaching under a heating vent in the hallway of an apartment building can get poked by a needle pushed underneath.
- A city waste collector can get poked by a needle sticking out of a garbage bag. Even needles in food containers can poke out if the container gets crushed.
- In addition to people getting hurt, a dog or cat can get poked wandering through bushes where needles are hidden.

These are just some of the examples of situations where people could get hurt. Safe needle disposal keeps our communities clean and safe for everyone.



### WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

We know picking up other people's garbage with bare hands is not a good idea because it's an easy way to spread infection. Needles are like other garbage. Picking up needles with your bare hands is a way to get infected if you have an open cut. When a person finishes using a needle, some of that person's blood may still be inside the needle or syringe. If you get poked by a needle, you could get sick as well.

Most people will not get sick by picking up or being poked by a used needle. When viruses in needles are exposed to the open air, the viruses usually die. There is no way to know how long a needle has been lying where you found it, so it is best to be safe.

- You may get tetanus.
- You may get a Staphylococcus Aureus infection.
- You may get hepatitis B.
- You are at risk getting hepatitis C, but the risk is negligible.
- You are extremely unlikely to get HIV because the virus does not live in the air for more than a few minutes. No one has ever gotten HIV from a needle stick injury from an abandoned needle.\*

### WHAT IS TETANUS?

Tetanus is a serious disease, caused by a poison from tetanus bacteria. It attacks muscle nerves and can be fatal.

- You can get the bacteria from needles that are not clean (sterilized).
- You get tetanus when you have an open cut and you touch bacteria in soil, feces or rusted metal.

*You can prevent tetanus...*

- By getting immunized.
- By using clean needles.
- By not touching feces and rusted metal with your bare hands.

Tetanus is treated with medication to try to get rid of the bacteria. If successful, there is a long period of recovery, often in intensive care.

\* BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS;  
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network



### WHAT IS STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS?

Staphylococcus Aureus is a group of bacteria, familiarly known as Staph (pronounced "staff"), that can cause diseases as a result of infection of various tissues of the body. Over 30 different types of Staphylococci can infect humans, but most infections are caused by Staphylococcus aureus. In the majority of cases, the bacteria do not cause disease. However, damage to the skin or other injury may allow the bacteria to overcome the natural protective mechanisms of the body, leading to infection.

- Staph can be spread from one person to another through casual contact or through contaminated objects. Staph infections can enter

the body through an open sore or cut.

- Staph is commonly spread from the hands of someone who has it. This could be anyone in a health care setting or in the community.

You can prevent staph infections...

- By practicing good hygiene.
- By washing your hands frequently.
- By covering wounds, and not sharing towels, needles or razors.

Staph infections are treated with antibiotics.

### WHAT IS HIV/AIDS?

The body is usually protected from illness by the immune system. When Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infects the body, it weakens the immune system. The infected person can easily get sick with rare and hard to treat infections and cancers. When the immune system is badly damaged, a person can develop Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

- HIV is found in all body fluids of an infected person. It is spread through blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk.

- HIV is spread by having unprotected sex.
- HIV is spread by sharing needles.

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.

There is no cure for HIV at this time.

### WHAT IS HEPATITIS?

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

- Hepatitis A is spread through contaminated food or water.
- Hepatitis B and C are spread from the blood or body fluids of one person who has hepatitis to the blood or body fluids of another person.
- You can get hepatitis if you share needles with someone who carries the virus.
- You can get the disease if you get poked by a needle with infected blood on it, but the risk is low.

- You can get the disease if you have sex with someone who is infected. The risk is low.

You can prevent getting or passing hepatitis to someone else...

- If you use clean needles every time.
- If you practice safer sex by using a condom.
- By getting the Hepatitis B vaccine.

Most people recover completely if they get sick with Hepatitis B. There is no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C. Only 3 of every 10 people with Hepatitis C know they have the disease and most carry the virus for a long time. Complex drug treatment works for some people.



## Unsafe Ways to Dispose of Needles

		WHY IS IT UNSAFE?
X	Putting needles in the garbage.	Waste collectors can get poked if the needles are loose or in a container. Containers can get crushed and the needles come through.
X	Putting needles in the recycling bin.	Waste management workers sort all the recycled items we put in blue bags by hand. A worker could get poked by a needle.
X	Putting needles down the toilet. Putting needles down the sewer.	The needles go into the sewer system and then into the ocean. City staff working in the drains could get poked and it is environmentally unclean.
X	Putting needles on the ground or under a bush.	A child, adult or pet could get scratched or poked. City cleaning staff could get poked.
X	Tucking needles into places they won't be seen.	A person cleaning, such as a janitor or housekeeping staff, could get hurt.

## Safe needle disposal

### CHILDREN ...

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

### ADULTS ...

If you see a discarded needle, you can choose to dispose of it yourself, or you can call for help (see below). You do not need to be afraid if you are cautious, as the risk of injury or infection are low.

1. Use a pair of tongs, pliers or tweezers to pick up the needle. It is best to wear rubber gloves.
2. Pick the needle up by pointing the needle tip down and away from you.
3. Put the needle in a container that has been placed on a stable surface. A sharps container, bleach container, or plastic peanut butter jar work well. You should not use a glass jar, light plastic container, or a milk carton, as they could break or needles could poke through.

**IMPORTANT:** Do not try to put the cap back on the needle.

4. Wash your hands with soap and warm water.

5. Take the container to a pharmacy, to AIDS Vancouver Island, or call VARCS' Mobile X or SOLID to come and pick it up. If you are a business in downtown Victoria, call the DVBA's Clean Team for a pick up.

OR

If you are not comfortable picking up the needle and need more information, you can call SOLID, VARCS or AVI to ask if someone is available to come and pick it up for you. If you are a business in the downtown core, you can call the DVBA's Clean Team. If the needle(s) are on public property, you can also call the City of Victoria's Civic Services for assistance.

*SEE PAGE 11 FOR PHONE NUMBERS.*

## When to call for help

- If you are too nervous to pick it up.
- If you see many needles in a pile, for example, in a stairwell or behind a dumpster.
- If you see broken needles scattered on the ground.
- If you have no way of taking the needle in a strong container to a safe place.



## What should you do if you get poked by a needle?

If you have been poked by a needle or other sharp object that you suspect has been in contact with blood or a body fluid containing blood.

1. IMMEDIATELY:
  - Wash the affected body part with soap and water;
  - Disinfect with an alcohol swab;
  - Apply a band aid.
2. Call VIHA Communicable Disease Program (weekdays 8:30—4:30) at 1-866- 665-6626 or go to the emergency room for assessment.
3. If the injury happens when you are at work, be sure to tell your immediate supervisor.



## Places to take needles

Needles can be dropped off at **AIDS VANCOUVER ISLAND**, located at 1601 Blanshard Street, from Monday to Thursday, 9am to 5pm, and Fridays 9am to 1pm. Please call if you have any questions about needle disposal or HIV and hepatitis C transmission: 250-384-2366 or toll free at 1-800-665-2437.

Some pharmacies will accept sharps containers for disposal. Please call your local pharmacy to ask about disposal options.

To have someone come and pick up needles on private property, please call the **VARCS Mobile X** at 250-888-4487 (weekdays), **SOLID's** syringe recovery team at 250-298-9197 (mornings, 7 days/week), or **AIDS Vancouver Island** (weekdays) 250-384-2366.



VICTORIA POLICE VEHICLES ARE EQUIPPED WITH SHARPS CONTAINERS.

If you have found needles on public property, please call the **City of Victoria** at 250-361-0400, or in city parks call 250-361-0600, for removal.

If you are a business located in downtown Victoria, call the **Downtown Victoria Business Association** for assistance from their Clean Team: 250-386-2238.

If you have been poked by a needle, please call **VIHA Communicable Disease Program** (weekdays 8:30—4:30) at 1-866-665-6626 or go to the emergency room for assessment.



## Resources

Findings of Mayor's Task Force on Breaking the Cycle of Mental Illness, Addictions and Homelessness: [www.victoria.ca/cityhall/cmmssn\\_hmlssn.shtml](http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/cmmssn_hmlssn.shtml)

City of Victoria's listing of social services and housing and accommodations: [www.victoria.ca/residents/profiles\\_rsrcs\\_sclsrvt.shtml](http://www.victoria.ca/residents/profiles_rsrcs_sclsrvt.shtml)

AIDS Vancouver Island: [www.AVI.org](http://www.AVI.org)

Downtown Victoria Business Association: [www.downtownvictoria.ca/](http://www.downtownvictoria.ca/)

Victoria AIDS Resource & Community Service Society: [www.VARCS.org](http://www.VARCS.org)

Victoria Police Department: [www.vicpd.ca](http://www.vicpd.ca)

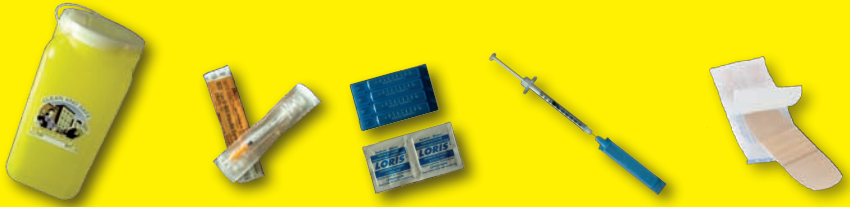
Victoria Cool Aid Society Community Health Clinic: [www.coolaid.org/health](http://www.coolaid.org/health)

British Columbia Centre for Disease Control: [www.bccdc.org](http://www.bccdc.org)

Vancouver Island Health Authority: [www.VIHA.ca](http://www.VIHA.ca)

"What is HIV/AIDS?" Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/info/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/info/index-eng.php)

Hepatitis C Information [www.hepcinfo.ca/](http://www.hepcinfo.ca/)







# Steps to Safe Needle Disposal

1

Do not try to put the cap back on the needle. Do not snap, break or bend any part of the needle.



2

Pick the needle up carefully with tongs or a gloved hand.

3



Put the needle in a hard plastic container and tightly seal and label it.

4

Take the needle to AIDS Vancouver Island or one of Victoria's yellow needle boxes.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SAFE NEEDLE DISPOSAL CALL VICTORIA AIDS RESOURCE & COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY'S MOBILE X (250-888-4487), AIDS VANCOUVER ISLAND (250-384-2366), OR SOLID (250-298-9197).