

# Safe disposal of sharps used by people with diabetes

**Position Statement (Updated: November 2018)**

## Why have we produced this position statement

Many people with diabetes need to use sharps, such as insulin syringes and fingertip lancing devices, to treat and manage their condition. These sharps need to be disposed of safely to minimise the risk of accidental injury or the spreading of infectious diseases.

Containers for sharps are available on prescription and in some places are provided by local authorities. However, we understand people with diabetes sometimes find it difficult to obtain a sharps container that is appropriate for their needs, to dispose of sharps in their local area and/or to find information about local collection/disposal services. In some cases this can mean that sharps are disposed of in household waste.

## How did we develop this position?

Diabetes UK have reviewed legislation and publically available information on local authorities' sharps policies, as well as engaging with the Local Government Association and people with diabetes, in order to produce this position statement.

## What we say about this position

To encourage and enable responsible behaviour, sharps disposal should be as easy as possible and take into account the preferences of people with diabetes. Every person with diabetes who uses sharps should have access to:

- Sharps containers that are appropriate to their individual needs and are available free of charge

- A free sharps collection service from their home or agreed alternative location, provided by their local authority or another appropriate body
- Alternative means of disposing of sharps locally which are free and convenient and take account of individual circumstances
- Accurate and easy to find information about local collection/disposal arrangements for sharps – this should be available on every local authority website and via the ‘request clinical waste collection’ page on the gov.uk website.

### **Recommendations for people with diabetes**

- Sharps should never be disposed of in domestic waste or recycling. This is potentially hazardous to anyone who comes into contact with the waste.

### **Recommendations for local authorities**

- Local authorities that do not provide a sharps collection service should consider how else they can fulfil their obligations relating to clinical waste collections, in discussion with local health services. They should make arrangements with other service providers to ensure everyone with diabetes who needs a home collection service is able to use one.
- Although local authorities are permitted to charge for collecting clinical waste from domestic properties, we encourage them not to do so. Paying for collection may be prohibitively expensive for many people with diabetes and could result in inappropriate disposal practices being adopted.
- Local authorities, given their responsibilities as waste collection authorities, should be the first port of call for anyone seeking information about sharps disposal. Websites should inform residents about local collection services and how these can be arranged. If a local authority does not provide the service itself it should publicise other arrangements that are in place, such as a list of healthcare providers that collect sharps. Websites and other sources of information should be regularly checked and updated.

## Recommendations for healthcare professionals

- Healthcare professionals who work with people with diabetes, and those who prescribe sharps boxes, should make themselves aware of local arrangements for sharps collection/disposal. They should inform patients about how to use sharps boxes, the availability of collection and disposal services and where to go for further assistance, as part of providing person centred care.

## Evidence and analysis - the reasons why we are saying what we do

- According to the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities, as waste collection authorities, have a duty to “arrange for the collection of household waste” in their area. For clinical waste, including sharps, this duty arises when a collection is requested by the person who controls the waste, such as a person with diabetes treating themselves at home.<sup>1</sup>
- Schedule 1 of the Controlled Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2012 enables local authorities to charge for collecting clinical waste from domestic properties. The definition of clinical waste includes sharps.<sup>2</sup>
- The provision of sharps collection/disposal services is currently inconsistent and local arrangements vary. Research carried out by Diabetes UK in July 2018 found that, of the 40 local authority websites reviewed, 35 said they provide clinical waste collections. Of these, 14 said they provide a free service, seven said they charge or may charge for this service. Nineteen local authorities did not include information about charges on their websites.<sup>3</sup>
- A small scale survey of people with diabetes conducted in October 2014 showed that 20% of respondents had difficulties with disposing of sharps and put them in household rubbish. The main stated reasons for this were lack of awareness of, and lack of availability of, other disposal options.<sup>4</sup>

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 45 Collection, disposal or treatment of controlled waste, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/43/section/45>
- <sup>2</sup> Controlled Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2012, Schedule 1 Household, industrial and commercial waste, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/811/contents/made>
- <sup>3</sup> Diabetes UK reviewed sharps policies on the websites of 40 local authorities in July 2018
- <sup>4</sup> Diabetes UK sent a short survey about sharps disposal to members of Diabetes Voices in October 2014 and received 207 responses