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25-022

Revised 07/2025

## **Medical, Infectious, and Medication Waste Disposal**

This guidance document has been produced by the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (DWEE) to provide information on the disposal of pharmaceutical, infectious, and biohazardous medical waste from household and non-household generators. Medical waste may include infectious waste such as bandages and dressings, hypodermic needles, lancets, and pharmaceuticals.

Infectious waste, meaning waste that can cause disease in those who come into contact with the waste, is defined in Nebraska [Title 132 – Integrated Solid Waste Management Regulations](#), Chapter 1, §053. Infectious wastes generated by a business must be rendered non-infectious before landfill disposal by incineration, autoclaving, or another treatment method that is effective in rendering waste non-infectious. Once rendered non-infectious, these wastes must be disposed of at a permitted Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) landfill. It is the responsibility of the waste generator to determine if the waste is infectious and to handle it properly. The receiving landfill or waste hauler may have additional restrictions or disposal requirements. Prior written approval from DWEE is not required for MSW landfill disposal of infectious wastes that have been rendered non-infectious. Businesses must dispose of their expired and unusable waste medical supplies themselves. The materials cannot be shipped back to the original supplier for disposal.

### **Household Medical Waste**

Household medical waste is waste generated through health care activities within the home. This includes home health care nurses. In general, medical waste generated in the home are not a serious health concern unless the waste is also an infectious waste. Households are not required to render their infectious wastes non-infectious before disposal at a MSW landfill. This waste can be added to your general household waste to be picked up by your garbage hauler.

A health provider such as a clinic or hospital may accept household medical waste for disposal, but they are not obligated to accept any medical wastes that are not generated at their own facility.

#### **How to Properly Package Household Infectious Wastes for Disposal:**

1. Place the waste in a rigid or semi-rigid, puncture-resistant, and leak-proof container
2. Do not mark or label the container in a way that divulges the contents
3. Tightly close or seal the container
4. Ensure the outside of the container is free from contamination

Any type of sharp medical waste such as needles or lancets should be placed in a puncture-resistant container whether they are infectious or not.

## **Household Medications Disposal**

Though household medications are not prohibited from being disposed of down a sanitary sewer or septic system, the practice is highly discouraged. Unused or expired medications from households may be taken to household hazardous waste collection events for disposal. Sponsors for collection events are allowed to place restrictions on the waste they accept and may not accept medications.

The Nebraska Medication Education for Disposal Strategies (MEDS) Coalition is a state-wide network of partners that promotes safe medication disposal by allowing people to turn in expired and unused medications at participating pharmacies. Disposal locations can be found on their website <https://www.nebraskameds.org/>.

Medications from households may also be rendered unusable by crushing them and mixing with dirt, cat litter, or another similar material, sealing in a plastic bag, and disposing of it in the trash. If the medication is disposed of in its original container, identifying markers of what the bottle contains should be removed. It is recommended for the trash to be put out right before the normal anticipated trash removal by waste haulers.

## **Non-Household Pharmaceuticals Disposal**

Most pharmaceuticals are non-hazardous, however all waste generators, except for households, are required to determine if their waste is hazardous. Hazardous waste should never be commingled with medical waste. Nebraska [Title 128 – Hazardous Waste Regulations](#) requires that Small Quantity Generators (SQGs) and Large Quantity Generators (LQGs) of hazardous waste must send their hazardous waste to a permitted Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facility (TSDF). See the DWEE Guidance Document titled “Comparison of Hazardous Waste Generator Requirements” for more information on determining generator status and requirements. The hazardous waste must be transported by a hazardous waste transporter with an ID number issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or an authorized state.

SQG and LQG hazardous waste cannot be disposed of at a household hazardous waste (HHW) collection event. Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generators (CESQGs) are also not allowed to bring their hazardous waste to a HHW collection event but may be able to take advantage of a locally sponsored small business waste collection event. The sponsors of collection events are allowed to place any restrictions they deem necessary on the wastes collected at their events.

## **Biohazardous Waste**

The term “biohazardous waste” is not defined in Nebraska regulations but is synonymous with the term infectious waste. Biohazardous and infectious waste generated by businesses must also be managed in accordance with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations. Biohazard waste is usually not a regulated hazardous waste unless it is a listed hazardous waste or possesses characteristics of hazardous waste.

## **Nursing Homes, Assisted Living, Long-term Care, and Hospice Facilities**

The individual quarters where a person routinely resides is considered a “household” and the medical waste generated within those quarters can be managed as household medical waste. Any medical waste generated in common areas such as nursing stations, exam rooms, meeting rooms, or hallways are not considered household medical waste and cannot be placed in the general trash.

For example, if a nurse administers an injection in a resident’s quarters at a retirement home, that waste would be considered household waste. If the same resident received the injection at a nurse’s station, that waste would not be considered household waste.

Long-term and hospice care facilities are usually driven by individual patient situations. If the patient is primarily receiving care much like a hospital, where the primary objective is treatment, then the household waste exclusion would not apply. If a patient is primarily residing in the room and receiving care much like a retirement home resident, then the household waste exclusion would apply to the waste generated within the resident’s room.

Some assisted living facilities are closely associated with a connected hospital, but the two facilities are considered separate as far as household medical waste generation. Tracking of medical waste in a dual-purpose facility may be necessary to ensure proper disposal.

## **Hospitals**

Hospital rooms cannot use the household waste exclusion because their primary function is to deliver treatments and are not used as a place to reside.

Some hospitals opt to have an autoclave to render their infectious waste non-infectious before disposal at a MSW landfill. This does not require a waste permit if the hospital is only treating their own waste. If the hospital receives waste from other locations or businesses, they will be required to be permitted as a solid waste processing facility by DWEE. This is also applicable for on-site incineration units. Separate National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) or Air permits may be needed from DWEE. Hazardous waste determinations should be made prior to waste being autoclaved or incinerated because hazardous waste is not allowed to be autoclaved or incinerated without a TSDF permit.

## **RESOURCES:**

- DWEE Home Page <https://dwee.nebraska.gov/>
- Nebraska MEDS Coalition <https://www.nebraskameds.org/>

## **Contacts:**

- DWEE Main Number (402) 471-2186
- DWEE Toll Free Number (877) 253-2603
- DWEE Hazardous Waste Compliance Assistant (402) 471-8308
- Email questions to: [DWEE.moreinfo@nebraska.gov](mailto:DWEE.moreinfo@nebraska.gov)

## DWEE Publications:

- Environmental Guidance Document – “Waste Determinations & Hazardous Waste Testing”
- Environmental Guidance Document – “Comparison of Hazardous Waste Generator Requirements”  
*Guidance documents are available on the DWEE website by clicking “Visit Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (DEE),” selecting “Forms,” and “Publications, Grants & Forms.”*
- [Title 128 – Nebraska Hazardous Waste Regulations](#)
- [Title 132 – Nebraska Integrated Solid Waste Management Regulations](#)  
*Titles are available on the DWEE website by clicking “Visit Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (DEE),” selecting “Resources and Services,” “Laws & Regulations,” and “Rules & Regulations.”*

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*Produced by: Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment, 245 Fallbrook Blvd. Ste.100, Lincoln, NE 68521; (402) 471-2186. To view this and other information related to our agency, visit our website at <https://dwee.nebraska.gov/>.*