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Title: Sharps pose risk
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What are sharps, you ask? Sharps are needles, pen needles, syringes, and lancets, essentially anything needle-like that is used for medical injections or blood testing. In Isabella County, a program has been piloted to minimize, and hopefully eliminate, the risk of needle-sticks to those who come into contact with used sharps.

Why are sharps a problem? According to www.safeneedledisposal.org, accidental needle-stick injuries can transmit blood-borne pathogens like Hepatitis B or C and HIV/AIDS. Nationwide, it is estimated that 3 billion needle injections occur outside of medical facilities. Approximately 2/3 of these injections occur in personal residences to treat illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, hepatitis, multiple-sclerosis, arthritis, psoriasis, and osteoporosis.

Isabella County, like other counties in Michigan, is faced with an immediate sharps predicament. Without clear and proper instructions for the disposal of sharps, community members are confused as to how to properly discard of their used sharps. Some residents are storing used sharps in their homes, some are disposing of the used sharps in the County's solid waste system, and others are leaving their sharps in their recycling bins. None of these options are acceptable! The improper disposal of these sharps is a County-wide health and safety hazard.

As a result, the Isabella County "Bee Smart" Community Sharps Coalition has been formed to deal with this health problem. Isabella County's Community Sharps collection program provides residents with free personal sharps containers. The program also provides permanent Community Sharps Collection Bins at drop-sites throughout the County where participants may dispose of their full containers. These collection bins can be found at several fire halls around Isabella County. By partnering with a medical waste disposal company, the County is able to ensure that these containers will then be collected and permanently disposed of in the safest manner possible. By building partnerships with local pharmacies, health service agencies, and public safety organizations the County hopes to provide residents with a safe and uniform way to dispose of their personal sharps.

Donations from several local organizations have made this program possible: Mt. Pleasant Rotary, Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation, Weidman Lions, Friends of Isabella County Seniors, Shepherd Rotary, and the Saginaw-Chippewa Indian Tribe.

Free personal sharps containers can be obtained at: Evans Drugs in Shepherd and Mission Pharmacy, Downtown Drugs, Sam's Club Pharmacy, Meijer Pharmacy, and the Nimkee Clinic Pharmacy in Mt. Pleasant. Also Isabella County Commission on Aging in Mt. Pleasant, as well as meal sites in Rosebush, Shepherd, Weidman and Winn.

Once full, the personal sharps containers can be placed in specially-fabricated, "fire-engine-red" disposal containers. The location for the drop-off bin closest to you is available at the above listed participating pharmacies.

If you use sharps, ask your pharmacist if they participate in the program. If they do not, please encourage them to. However, anyone can get a free personal sharps container at the currently participating pharmacies. Together, we can ensure the safe disposal of sharps in our community. For more information, please visit www.BeeSmartSharps.org, call (989) 773-9631 or email recycling@isabellacounty.org.

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