

For Immediate Release | July 13, 2018

IH's position on improperly discarded needles

Effective retrieval of improperly discarded needles is a priority for Interior Health's Harm Reduction program. Roughly 99% of the needles distributed in our communities in 2017 were properly disposed of by Interior Health. All Interior Health public health centres, mental health & substance use and primary care clinics, as well as all community agencies who distribute harm reduction supplies also properly dispose of needles.

Interior Health is working with municipalities to install new large industrial sharps bins in hot-spot areas to increase easy access to safe disposal options. The number of personal sharps containers being distributed throughout communities has also been increased substantially.

Collaboration with municipalities, community agencies, and concerned citizens is essential to minimize any impact of improperly discarded needles in the community. Interior Health appreciates innovation and encourages communities to develop programs tailored to address their needs. Regarding the recently developed needle buyback programs, it is the experience of other communities across our province that such a program wasn't feasible for the following reasons:

- Examining and counting individual needles is not recommended, as it increases the possibility of needle poke injuries.
- Placing a monetary value on used needles may result in people stealing or breaking into sharps containers that are being placed to increase access to safe needle disposal. Not only does this put people at risk of being poked by a needle, it may actually result in more drug-related litter left behind.
- Concerns that people may request and then return unused needles for the purpose of generating a profit.

We want to thank organizations and individuals seeking out ways to make improvements, and invite them to discuss their ideas with their Community Action Teams (CAT), Harm Reduction Agencies, local governments or directly with Interior Health at harmreduction.coordinator@interiorhealth.ca.

- Dr. Silvina Mema, Medical Health Officer, Interior Health

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STATEMENT