

Medical Waste

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can I dispose of used syringes?

The medical waste rules do not prohibit the disposal of used syringes in the trash provided that the [sharps](#) are placed in a rigid, leak-proof when in an upright position, and puncture-resistant container. Healthcare facilities should contact the local solid waste authority to make sure that there are no local ordinances against this practice. See ([15A NCAC 13B .1202](#)).

2. I need to transport medical waste from my healthcare facility to be treated. Do you have a list of transporters?

The Department does not keep a list of medical waste transporters. A list of [North Carolina Permitted Medical Waste Treatment Facilities](#) is available on our website. They may be able to provide transport service or put you in contact with a transporter.

3. I want to start a trauma scene cleanup business. What do I need to know about the medical waste rules?

Medical waste is defined as “any solid waste generated in the diagnosis, treatment, or immunization of humans beings or animals...” The waste generated at trauma scenes is not included in the definition of medical waste and is exempt from the medical waste management rules. However, even though the waste is considered non-medical for the purposes of disposal, the presence of human tissues and/or body fluids still renders the waste biohazardous and [universal precautions](#) apply.

4. What waste from a funeral home is considered medical waste?

Typically, regulated medical waste from funeral homes would be blood and body fluids. Many funeral homes are connected to a sanitary sewer; as that is an appropriate disposal method for this waste type. Funeral homes not connected to a sanitary sewer need a holding tank. The tank will have to be pumped periodically and the fluids taken to a municipal wastewater treatment plant.

5. I would like to retain the placenta after the birth. Do the medical waste management rules allow me to do that?

The medical waste management rules do not prohibit a person from taking possession of the placenta after a birth. You should consult with your physician to retain the placenta.

6. I would like to start a medical waste transport business. What do I need to do?

The Department does not license or permit medical waste generators and medical waste transporters. As such, licenses or permits are not issued. However, there are medical waste management rules that govern both generators and transporters. See ([15A NCAC 13B .1203](#)).

7. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) considers blood-soaked items (bandages, dressing, tubing, gowns, etc.) to be regulated medical waste although the Department’s medical waste management rules do not. Whose rules prevail.

The OSHA standards apply to employee safety and medical waste containers however, the treatment and disposal methods used for medical waste is under the purview of state regulation.

8. I have some unwanted and expired pharmaceuticals. How can I dispose of them?

The Department considers any pharmaceutical waste which is not [RCRA restricted](#) [hazardous waste] to be general solid waste and may be disposed of in the trash. Some counties have [drop boxes at county collection centers](#) so that residents can dispose of their unwanted pharmaceuticals. It is no longer permissible that unwanted pharmaceuticals be disposed of by flushing down the commode.

9. I saw a red bag with a biohazard symbol on the street awaiting pickup by the trash collector. Is that allowed?

The red bag designation with the biohazard symbol is an industry standard used to identify medical waste at the workplace/healthcare facility. It is not intended to be a designation of what types of medical waste are to be directly disposed of or transported for treatment prior to disposal.



The biohazard symbol designates waste that is infectious but not necessarily regulated.

10. I work at a manufacturing plant and sometimes we generate bloody bandages due to minor accidents. Do the medical waste management rules apply?

The medical waste management rules generally apply to medical facilities such as hospitals, long term care facilities, out-patient clinics, doctors' offices, dentists, veterinarians and similar healthcare facilities. Medical waste that requires treatment is limited to blood and body fluids in individual containers in volumes greater than 20 ml, human tissues, organs, body parts, the carcasses of infected animals, and cultures and stocks of infectious agents. Bloody bandages do not fall into this category and do not require treatment. Placing the waste into a properly identified bag with a biohazard symbol may apply. See [\(15A NCAC 13B .1202\)](#).

11. I work at a hospital. I've been told to decrease the amount we spend for medical waste disposal. Do you have any suggestions?

Review the [Medical Waste Management rules](#) and confirm that what is being sent for treatment is required to be treated. In many instances, healthcare facilities treat medical waste that is not regulated medical waste. Verify that the best treatment option has been chosen for a specific waste type. For example, the best disposal method for human body fluids is treatment by a municipal wastewater treatment plant.

12. I'm a dentist and was wondering if the state's medical waste management rules consider extracted teeth to be regulated medical waste?

Pathological waste is human tissues, organs, and body parts and the carcasses and body parts of animals with a disease transmittable to humans. Extracted teeth, kidney stones, and gallstones are not considered

pathological waste because they are composed of minerals and are not known to transmit infectious disease. Extracted teeth with mercury amalgams is regulated by the Department's Hazardous Waste Section.

13. I'm a veterinarian and I want to know if it is acceptable to dispose of animal body parts, principally from spaying and neutering, in the trash?

The medical waste management rules allow for the disposal of animal body parts in the trash providing that the parts do not come from an animal infected with a disease which is transmissible to humans. See [\(15A NCAC 13B.1201\(9\)\)](#).

14. I work in a histology lab and we have laboratory slides with fixed and stained human tissues. Can we place them in the trash?

Human tissues affixed to slides is a pathological waste per [15A NCAC 13B.1201\(9\)](#). It may be disposed of in the trash if procedures involved in the fixing and staining process kill the pathogens and render the tissues noninfectious. However, the slides are required to be placed in a sharps container or a container that is rigid, leak-proof when in an upright position, and puncture-resistant prior to disposal. This determination does not apply to frozen or refrigerated tissues, unfixed tissue blocks, or gross anatomical parts.

15. What to do when regulated medical waste is mixed with hazardous waste?

The Department's medical waste management rules are promulgated at the state level. Hazardous waste regulations are promulgated at the federal level. Hazardous waste transport, storage, and disposal rules are more stringent than those for medical waste in North Carolina. Hazardous chemical wastes pose a greater threat to human health and the environment. Therefore, the hazardous waste rules will take precedence. If the regulated medical waste cannot be safely separated from the hazardous waste the entire load is considered hazardous waste. Whether the load is incinerated at a hazardous waste incinerator or landfilled at a hazardous waste landfill, both methods exceed the requirements of the North Carolina Medical Waste Management rules for treatment and disposal.

16. Can you explain why medical waste is sometimes referred to as regulated medical waste (RMW) and at other times hazardous wastes?

Medical waste is often referred to as hazardous waste when it should more properly be referred to as biohazardous waste to distinguish it from hazardous waste. These are two separate regulatory structures that can be confused when a biohazard is inaccurately labeled a hazardous waste. Medical waste comes under the authority of the Solid Waste Section - [Medical Waste Management rules](#) and hazardous wastes are under the authority of the [Hazardous Waste Section](#).

17. How should our healthcare facility dispose of empty, expired, or unwanted glass vials and ampoules that contained a vaccine for human use?

Unless the vaccines are in some way infectious and can cause disease, they are considered non-regulated medical waste and may be disposed of in the trash.

18. Tanning beds are regulated by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Health Service Regulation - Radiation Protection Section. See <http://www.ncradiation.net/tanning/Tanning.htm>.
19. X-ray machines are regulated by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Health Service Regulation - Radiation Protection Section, Radiology Compliance Branch. See <http://www.ncradiation.net/Xray/xray.htm>.
20. Radioactive material is regulated by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Health Service Regulation - Radiation Protection Section, Radioactive Materials Branch. See [http://www.ncradiation.net/rms/rmsstaffdir2\(rev03\).htm](http://www.ncradiation.net/rms/rmsstaffdir2(rev03).htm).
21. Tattoo parlors are regulated by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health - Environmental Health Section. Sharps are required to be stored and disposed of in containers that are rigid, puncture-resistant, and leak-proof when in an upright position. See <https://ehs.ncpublichealth.com/docs/rules/294306-13-3200.pdf> (specifically: 15A NCAC 18A .3208(c)).
22. Acupuncture needles are required to be disposed of in a sharps container or a container that is rigid, leak-proof when in an upright position, and puncture resistant.