



Disposal of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Contaminated Waste

Medical Waste – General Information

Definition of Medical Waste

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) generally define medical waste as special waste from health care-related facilities (25 TAC 1.132(46) and 30 TAC 326.3(23)), and includes: treated and untreated animal waste, bulk human blood and body fluids, microbiological waste, pathological waste, and sharps.

TCEQ's webpage [*What is Medical Waste?*](#) contains additional information on medical waste generation and treatment.

Note – DSHS's and TCEQ's definitions of medical waste and health-care facilities excludes waste from single or multi-family dwellings, hotels, motels, or other establishments that provide lodging and related services for the public. Waste from these sources may be disposed of with regular municipal solid waste. Additional recommendations for disposal of COVID-19 wastes from residences and businesses are provided below.

Medical Waste Treatment Methods

Approved methods for treatment of medical waste are listed in DSHS rules and include steam sterilization (autoclave), incineration, chemical treatments, and shredding (25 TAC 1.136). After treatment, medical waste may be managed as routine municipal solid waste and disposed of in a municipal solid waste landfill.

Medical Waste Facilities Regulated by TCEQ

TCEQ regulates entities that manage medical waste, including transportation, storage, transfer, and treatment facilities. These rules include requirements for labeling and packaging, transportation, storage times, and handling procedures.

As of March 2020, Texas has 15 active medical waste treatment facilities. A list of [Active Medical Waste Facilities in Texas](#) is available on the TCEQ website.

Managing COVID-19 Wastes from Health Care-Related Facilities

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend that the management of waste materials related to COVID-19 from healthcare facilities should be performed in accordance with routine handling procedures for medical waste (for example: lab specimens, sharps, cleaning cloths, wipes, single-use microfiber cloths, etc.). Continue to reference and follow guidance from CDC, WHO, and DSHS on best practices for managing COVID-19 wastes.

Managing COVID-19 Wastes from Residences and Businesses

Follow CDC's recommendations for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. If possible, dedicate a lined trash can for any ill person.

- Residential
- Businesses

Double-bag contaminated wastes - place all used gloves, facemasks, and other disposable items in a bag that can be tied closed before placed in another bag with other wastes. Place this bag in a rigid trash container, like a trash can with a lid or dumpster.

Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately after removing gloves or handling trash bags.



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COVID-19: Waste Disposal Guidance

Relevant to TCEQ's responsibilities associated with the State's Biological Hazards Annex, our agency has prepared regulatory guidance regarding the transportation, treatment and disposal of COVID-19 medical waste. TCEQ also stands ready to provide technical assistance to these facilities and local jurisdictions to help them handle any associated issues that may arise.

Medical Waste Transportation, Treatment, and Disposal:

Under the State Biological Hazards Annex, TCEQ is responsible for providing technical and regulatory guidance regarding authorized medical waste transporters, disposal facilities, and waste incinerators—plus provide local jurisdiction(s) with a list of authorized medical waste transporters, disposal facilities, and waste incinerators. Please see the guidance and documents below.


COVID-19 Medical Waste Classification:

COVID-19 medical wastes should be handled as **Regulated Medical Waste** (*49 CFR 173.134 and 30 TAC Chapter 326, Subchapter B, §326.21(c)*), just like the medical waste from seasonal flu patients. **See TCEQ's regulatory guidance on disposal of COVID 19 medical waste (/downloads/response/covid-19/coronavirus-disposal-contaminated-waste-2020-03-16.pdf) .**

- **This would include:** Waste or reusable material derived from the medical treatment of a human or animal, which includes diagnosis and immunization materials. Also included are disposable materials (e.g., any single-use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), cleaning cloths, wipes, single-use microfiber cloths, linens, food service) and linens, privacy curtains, and other textiles.
- **What about waste from quarantined patients not yet diagnosed, or suspected cases?** If the waste is generated from a health-care related facility it should be handled as regulated medical waste¹. If the waste is generated outside a health-care facility, then TCEQ would defer to CDC and Texas DSHS guidance and recommendations.


Transporting COVID-19 Regulated Medical Waste:

Regulated medical waste can be transported with other medical waste. Health-care facilities and generators of medical waste generally use standard medical waste plastic bags (red) in a rigid waste receptacle designed for this use. The waste container should be properly labeled to identify it as medical waste. Labels should reflect the generator name, address, and date of shipment (USDOT and OSHA labeling requirements also apply). Specific details about packaging and labeling requirements can be found in 30 TAC Chapter 326.17-21. Untreated medical waste is generally transported in refrigerated box trucks.

- *The TCEQ recommends using rigid containers to minimize cutting into the containers and not recycling containers—use one-time use containers.*
- *Texas has 100 authorized regulated medical waste transporters. **See TCEQ list of regulated medical waste transporters and treaters** . (</downloads/response/covid-19/all-mw-transporters-n-onsite-treaters.xlsx>)*

Treating COVID-19 Regulated Medical Waste:

Regulated medical waste can be treated just like other medical waste using steam-sterilization (autoclaving), incineration, or an alternative method (such as using chemicals). Treatment can be done by a generator who treats medical waste on-site, mobile treatment units, or off-site treatment facilities.

- *Texas has 15 authorized active regulated medical waste treatment facilities, along with 3 authorized mobile on-site treatment units. **See TCEQ's list of medical waste treatment facilities** (</assets/public/permitting/waste/msw/medical-waste-facilities-active.pdf>) .*

Disposing of Regulated Medical Waste:

COVID-19 regulated medical waste, after treatment, can be managed as routine municipal solid waste and placed in a municipal solid waste Type I or Type IAE landfill.

¹ These items are not regulated as medical wastes because they do not meet the definition of "medical wastes." H&S Code Section 361.003(18)(a) and 30 TAC 326.1 (Purpose & applicability) define "medical wastes" as treated and untreated wastes from health care related facilities. "Health Care Related Facilities" are defined in Section 361.003(14)(a) and are listed under 25 TAC 1.134.

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TCEQ Medical Waste Treatment Video



TCEQ Medical Waste Treatment Video

TCEQ ensures that all medical waste facilities in Texas meet state requirements. *All of the options in this video will treat COVID-19 waste.*

Also, see more on TCEQ medical waste regulation ([/permitting/waste_permits/msw_permits/medwaste/medwaste](#)).

Managing COVID-19 Wastes from Residences and Businesses

Follow CDC's recommendations for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. If possible, dedicate a lined trash can for any ill person.

- Residential (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html>)
- Businesses (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>)


Double-bag contaminated wastes—place all used gloves, facemasks, and other disposable items in a bag that can be tied closed before placed in another bag with other wastes. Place this bag in a rigid trash container, like a trash can with a lid or dumpster.

Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately after removing gloves or handling trash bags.

TCEQ Regulatory Guidance: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
(<https://www.tceq.texas.gov/response/covid-19/tceq-preparedness-responsibilities-covid-19>)

COVID-19: Waste Disposal Guidance (<https://www.tceq.texas.gov/response/covid-19/waste-disposal-guidance>)

COVID-19: Public Water Systems (<https://www.tceq.texas.gov/response/covid-19/covid-19-public-water-system-disinfection>)

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