

How to Dispose of Medicines Properly

Medications are important for treating many conditions and diseases, however they may be harmful if taken by someone that does not need them. To avoid accidental exposure or intentional misuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs it is important you dispose of them properly.

DON'T Flush expired or unwanted medications down the toilet or drain unless the label specifically instructs you to do so.

DO Return unwanted or expired medications to a drug take-back program or follow the steps for household disposal below

How to Dispose of Medications

Drug Take-Back Events

The preferred way to dispose of unwanted medications is through a local take-back program. For more information call your city or county government's household trash and recycling service and ask if a drug take-back program is available in your community. Some counties hold household hazardous waste collection days, where prescription and over-the-counter drugs are accepted at a central location for proper disposal.

Household Disposal Steps*

If no disposal instructions are provided on the medication's label and no drug take-back program is available in your area, follow the recommended steps below to safely dispose of your medication:

1. Take your medications
2. Mix drugs with an undesirable substance, such as dirt, cat litter or used coffee grounds, out of their original containers.
3. Put the mixture into a disposable container with a lid, such as an empty margarine tub, or into a sealable bag.
4. Remove any personal information from the medication's original container, including Rx number, by covering it with permanent marker or duct tape, or by scratching it off
5. The sealed container with the drug mixture, and the empty drug containers, can now be placed in the trash.

* *Drug Disposal Guidelines, Office of National Drug Control Policy, October 2009*

Continued on back

How Proper Disposal of Medicines Protects You and the Earth

- > Prevents poisoning of children and pets.
- > Prevents misuse by teenagers and adults.
- > Avoids health problems from accidentally taking the wrong medicine, too much of the same medicine, or a medicine that is too old to work well.
- > Keeps medicines from entering streams and rivers when poured down the drain or flushed down the toilet.

How Improper Disposal of Medicines May End Up in Our Drinking Water Sources

In homes that use septic tanks, drugs flushed down the toilet can leach into the ground and seep into ground water.

In cities and towns where residences are connected to wastewater treatment plants, drugs poured down the sink or flushed down the toilet can pass through the treatment system and enter rivers and lakes. They may flow downstream to serve as sources for community drinking water supplies. Water treatment plants are generally not equipped to routinely remove medicines.

Information provided by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

For more information go to www.epa.gov/ppcp/ or call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791 April 2011