



How to Dispose of Unused Medicines

Preferred Disposal

To address these concerns, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) worked with the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to develop the first consumer guidance document for proper disposal of prescription drugs in February 2007. This policy was updated in April 2009 and the guidelines are summarized below:

1. Follow any specific disposal instructions on the drug label or patient information form. Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet unless instructed by this documentation.
2. If no disposal instructions are provided, throw the drugs in the household trash.
 - a. Before throwing out a medicine container, remove or scratch out all identifying information on the prescription label to make it unreadable. This will help protect your identity and the privacy of your personal health information.
 - b. Take medications out of their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance.
 - * For solid medications, add a small amount of water or other liquid to cause the pills or capsules to dissolve.
 - * For liquid medications, add coffee grounds or kitty litter to absorb the medication.
 - * For blister packs, wrap the blister packages containing the pills in multiple layers of duct tape or opaque tape.
 - * Unused ampules, vials and IV bags should not be opened (other than to scratch out the patient's name). Wrap the item with duct or other opaque tape to minimize breakage and then place in an opaque plastic container, such as an empty yogurt or margarine tub.

The medication will be less desirable to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may intentionally go through the trash.

- c. Put the medication that has been combined with the undesirable substance in a sealable bag, empty can or other container to prevent leaking into the garbage. The top of the container can be duct taped to the bottom of the container for additional security.
3. Do not give medications to friends. Doctors prescribe drugs based on a person's specific symptoms and medical history.

Other Disposal Opportunities

Some pharmacies are beginning to accept medications back from the public as a community service. Controlled substances (which are often prescription pain killers), however, can only be accepted under special collection arrangements due to federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) regulations.

Some hazardous waste collection companies offer special collection services for a significant fee.

Flushing of Certain Medicines

There is a small number of medicines that may be especially harmful and, in some cases, fatal with just one dose if they are used by someone other than the person for whom the medicine was prescribed. To prevent accidental ingestion by children, pets, or anyone else, a few medicines have specific disposal instructions indicating they should be flushed down the sink or toilet as soon as they are no longer needed, and when they cannot be disposed of through a medicine take-back program. For example, patients in assisted living communities using fentanyl patches for pain should immediately flush their used or unneeded patches down the toilet. When you dispose of these patches and certain other powerful medicines down the sink or toilet you help to keep others safe by ensuring that these medicines cannot be used again or accidentally ingested and cause harm.

You may have also received disposal directions for these medicines when you picked up your prescription. **If your medicine is on this list**, and you did not receive information containing disposal instructions along with your dispensed prescription, you can find instructions on how to dispose of the medicines at [DailyMed](#)³, by searching on the drug name and then looking in one of the following sections of the prescribing information:

- Information for Patients and Caregivers
- Patient Information
- Patient Counseling Information
- Safety and Handling Instructions
- Medication Guide

FDA remains committed to working with other federal agencies and medicine manufacturers to develop alternative, safe disposal policies. Below is some additional information about flushing medicine when it is no longer needed. If you have additional questions about disposing of your medicine, please contact us at 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332).

For additional information, see

http://www.azdeq.gov/environ/waste/solid/download/pharm_drug_disposal_brochure-10-25-11.pdf



ADEQ: Arizona Department of Environmental Quality

Home Medical Sharps Disposal

The handling and disposal of used home generated medical sharps such as needles, syringes, and lancets, are exempted from regulation in Arizona's Medical Waste Regulations (Arizona Administrative Code (A.A.C.) R18-13-1401 et seq.). However, these materials still need to be handled safely. ADEQ needs your help in ensuring that medical sharps are disposed of in a manner that helps minimize health risks to garbage haulers, landfill personnel and the community.

Medical sharps should be placed in either a purchased medical sharps container (from a pharmacy or health care provider) or a heavy-plastic or metal container. The containers should be puncture-proof with a tight-fitting lid. Household containers such as plastic detergent bottles can be used if the following precautions are observed:

- Use heavy-duty tape such as electrical or duct tape to secure the lid to the container.
- Write the words "Not Recyclable" on the container with a black indelible marker. This helps to ensure the container will not be inadvertently mingled with recyclable materials.
- Do not use a clear or glass container.
- Do not over-stuff the containers with medical sharps. This can increase pressure on the lid and cause a release of the medical sharps.

While waiting for a full container, keep out of reach of children and pets. Always wash your hands after handling or touching medical sharps. Once you have followed these precautions, the container may be placed in your regular trash for disposal.