

Managing Unwanted medications

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Studies show that medicines flushed down the drain can contaminate our lakes and streams, which can hurt fish and other aquatic wildlife, and end up in our drinking water. This is because municipal wastewater treatments systems cannot remove medications from the wastewater. Some medications, such as hormones and antidepressants, interfere with the reproduction and normal growth of many aquatic species, such as frogs and fish.

Prevent abuse and accidental poisoning



Medicines in home cabinets are the second highest cause of accidental poisoning in children and adults. These drugs are also highly susceptible to misuse and abuse. Studies show that people who abuse prescription drugs often obtain them from medicine cabinets of family and friends.

Store all medications in their original containers and in a place that children and visitors cannot easily access. Sort through medications annually and properly dispose of outdated and unneeded medications.

How to properly dispose of medications

Don't flush old or unwanted prescriptions or over-the-counter medications down the toilet or drain and don't put them in the trash.

There are more than 300 medication collection boxes located at law enforcement facilities and pharmacies in Minnesota. These collection sites do not charge any disposal fees. Collection sites accept all medicines from households, including prescription, over-the-counter, liquid, solid, and pet medicines.

Wright County disposal site for unwanted medications

Please click on the [link](#) for the Wright County Take Bank Initiative for Unwanted Prescriptions.

When using a collection site

Collection sites have different lists of what they accept. **Always** check with the collection site for any restrictions.

- You cannot retrieve an item once you placed it in a drop box.
- Keep prescription medications in their original container. Remove patient information and prescription numbers.
- DEA regulations prohibit placing illicit drugs (cocaine, heroin) or business-generated medications in a bin.
- **Chemotherapy drugs** in capsule form may be taken to a collection site in the original container. Liquid chemotherapy drugs should be returned to the clinic that issued them due to the potential to expose collectors and the public to cytotoxic drugs.
- **Unused needles with syringes that still contain medication** may be put in medication collection boxes if they are first placed in a puncture-proof container. Used needles are not accepted at medication collection sites. Contact your county solid waste office to find out whether there is a collection option for used needles. Never place containers with used needles or syringes in a recycling bin or loose sharps in the garbage.
- **Mercury-containing devices** cannot be safely incinerated, so **do not** bring mercury thermometers or other devices to medication collection boxes. Mercury is a potent neurotoxin. Take mercury-containing products to your county household hazardous waste collection facility.

Disposing of medications when a collection site isn't available

Don't flush old or unwanted prescriptions or over-the-counter medications down the toilet or drain.

Many pharmacies sell envelopes that you can fill and mail. The companies that sell these envelopes will incinerate the medications. Follow the directions on the envelopes.

Incineration at a permitted waste-to-energy facility is the best method for destruction of household pharmaceuticals. If you know your garbage goes to an incinerator, you can safely dispose of your medications using the instructions below.

- **Keep** prescription medications in their original containers. Cover the patient's name and prescription number with permanent marker. Over-the-counter medications may be placed in a grocery or other non-transparent bag and placed in the garbage.
- **Modify** the contents of prescription medications to discourage anyone from taking them. For pills or capsules, add vinegar to the container to dissolve them. Add table salt or flour to liquids.
- **Seal and conceal** prescription medication containers. Tape the lid shut with duct tape and place the container inside an opaque piece of trash, such as an empty margarine tub. For blister packs, wrap packages containing pills in opaque tape like duct tape.
- **Throw** the container in the garbage.



What's in our water?

Research by the MPCA confirms that a wide variety of unregulated chemicals is ending up in Minnesota's lakes and rivers. The chemicals, including pharmaceuticals and personal care products, are of concern because many have properties that can interfere with the functioning of hormones in animals and people.