

**Office of Integrated Health
Health & Safety Information**

Dr. Dawn M. Adams DNP, ANP-BC, CHC
Director, Office of Integrated Health

Why and How to Dispose Medications

Individuals, caregivers, residential providers should remove expired or unused medicines from the home as quickly as possible to help reduce the chance of a medication error such as; 1) that others may accidentally take the medication and / or 2) that others might misuse the unneeded medicine.

Expired, Unwanted, or Unused medicines should be discarded consistent with 12VAC35-105-770. Medication Management... “The provider shall promptly dispose of discontinued drugs, outdated drugs,”... “according to the applicable regulations of the Virginia Board of Pharmacy.”

There are two main ways this can be done:

- 1. Through a drug “take back” program**
- 2. Through a home disposal method**



Drug Take Back Programs

- National Prescription Drug Take Back Day which is sponsored by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in communities nationwide. The next date can be found on the FDA website.
- Many communities also have their own drug take back programs. Check with your local law enforcement officials.
- Find a location near you of a DEA-authorized collector in your community at the Virginia Board of Pharmacy website (<https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/pharmacy/destructionsites.asp>)
- Ask your pharmacy. Many pharmacies take back medications. In June 2018, Virginia residents became able to dispose of their unused medications at certain CVS Pharmacies around the state. Disposal of unwanted medication is critical in addressing and preventing opioid abuse. (<https://www.cvs.com/content/safer-communities-locate>)

How to Dispose of Medicines at Home

There are three ways to dispose of medicine, depending on the drug.

1) Flushing medicines

Because some medicines could be especially harmful to others, they have specific directions to immediately flush them down the sink or toilet when they are no longer needed.

How will you know?

- Check the label or the patient information leaflet with your medicine
- Consult the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's list of medicines recommended for disposal by flushing.

2) Disposing medicines in household trash

Almost all medicines can be thrown into your household trash. These include prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs in pills, liquids, drops, patches, creams, and inhalers.

Follow these steps:

1. Remove the drugs from their original containers and mix them with something undesirable, such as used coffee grounds, dirt, or cat litter. This makes the medicine less appealing to children and pets and unrecognizable to someone who might intentionally go through the trash looking for drugs.
2. Put the mixture in something you can close (a re-sealable zipper storage bag, empty can, or other container) to prevent the drug from leaking or spilling out.
3. Throw the container in the garbage.
4. Scratch out all your personal information on the empty medicine packaging to protect your identity and privacy. Throw the packaging away.

3) Use a Medication Disposal Pouch or Container

You can now get a drug disposal bag from your Local Health Department.

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/blog/2016/11/15/how-to-dispose-of-unused-medicine/>



Once you get your bag you can deactivate medications in three easy steps:

1. Place unused medication in the pouch
2. Fill halfway with Warm Tap Water
3. Gently Shake

**If you have a question about your specific medications,
Always ask your health care provider or pharmacist!!**

For example, there are specific instructions for some medications such as:

Disposing of Fentanyl Patches

- This adhesive patch delivers a strong pain medicine through the skin. Even after a patch is used, a lot of the medicine remains. That's why the drug comes with instructions to flush used or leftover patches.

Disposing of Inhaler Products

One environmental concern involves inhalers used by people who have asthma or other breathing problems, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.



- Read handling instructions on the labeling of inhalers and aerosol products.
- These products could be dangerous if punctured or thrown into a fire or incinerator.
- To properly dispose of these products and follow local regulations and laws, contact your trash and recycling facility



Frequently Asked Questions



What is the concern about flushing drugs?

There are concerns about the small levels of drugs that may be found in surface water, such as rivers and lakes, and in drinking water supplies.

“The main way drug residues enter water systems is by people taking medicines and then naturally passing them through their bodies,” says Raanan Bloom, Ph.D., an environmental assessment expert at the FDA. “Many drugs are not completely absorbed or metabolized by the body and can enter the environment after passing through wastewater treatment plants.”

The FDA and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency take the concerns of flushing certain medicines in the environment seriously. Still, there has been no sign of environmental effects caused by flushing recommended drugs.

How can I find my local Health Department?

There are many health department offices located through-out Virginia. These offices are spread across health districts. To find what health district you are located in you can go to: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/>. You can also use the Virginia Department of Health – “health department locator” at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/>

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Hughes Melton, MD
Commissioner



Post Office Box 1797
Richmond, Virginia 23218-1797