

A close-up photograph of a bowl filled with numerous round, yellow and orange pills. The lighting is warm, creating a soft glow around the pills.

## *drug take-back program*

# TUTORIAL

*From acid reflux and weight loss aid to depression, there's a medicine for everything. And because of this belief, medicine cabinets are filled with medications that all too often gather dust until spring cleaning. The typical response is to simply flush the medicine down the toilet or to throw it in the trash. These disposal practices can lead to unintended consequences that can hurt children, others and the environment.*

Unlike institutional disposal activities that are governed by state and Federal statutes, there are no consistent rules that stipulate how to discard consumer medications. This reality has recently prompted the development of guidelines on how to properly dispose of Rx and over-the-counter medications. Drug take-back programs—strategies that provide pathways for consumers to turn in unused medications during designated times and at specific locations—hold promise and have been adopted by almost half of the states. This Tutorial will guide coalitions on how to successfully create and implement these activities. Most of the ideas have been obtained through the Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant's *Disposal of Unwanted Medicines: A Resource for Action in Your Community*. Coalitions are urged to study this guide for more details on how to implement successful take-back programs.

**“As important as ‘lock up your meds’ is, the proper disposal of your meds is just as important, and community events such as health fairs, provide great venues to launch drug take-back campaigns. Through the help of a nurse who is one of our coalition members, we realized that offering Rx disposal at these events provides an important service to the community. Luckily, we also have the local police department on board to supervise collection activities. This set-up helps us educate the community about the value of both strategies—coupled together, we can help keep our children and young people safe and healthy.”**

**Dr. Charlene McGunn**

*Executive Director, Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth & Families, Clinton Township, MI*

# know the **FACTS**

*Keeping medications when they are no longer needed, storing them improperly and throwing medicines away in the trash or dumping them in the toilet can lead to:*

## **UNINTENTIONAL OR ACCIDENTAL POISONING—PARTICULARLY AMONG CHILDREN, SENIOR CITIZENS AND PETS**

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, medicines are the most common poison exposure category in the U.S. and unfortunately, when medicines are not stored or discarded properly, people can get sick and/or die. As late as 2003, out of the 78,000 children under age five who were treated for poisonings in U.S. hospital emergency rooms, 45 percent were attributed to medicines (*Disposal of Unwanted Medicines: A Resource for Action in Your Community*). Senior citizens, who are the biggest consumers of Rx medications, can get sick due to the consumption of out-of-date medicines stored in the home. Use of these drugs to treat new problems can result in confusion over dosages, which medicines take, etc. (*Disposal of Unwanted Medicines: A Resource for Action in Your Community*).

## **DRUG ABUSE**

If not disposed of or stored properly, these medications can be stolen and re-sold by family members and friends. This is particularly relevant regarding teenagers. Approximately 56.5 percent of teenagers obtain Rx medications from friends or relatives, as compared to 18.1 percent who had the medicines prescribed to them by a doctor (*2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*).

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS**

Medication residues leach into water systems, posing serious threats to wildlife. Traces of hormones, antibiotics, anti-depressants, tranquilizers, beta-blockers and other chemicals derived from Rx medications are found in our water and have been linked to development problems in fish and frogs (*Disposal of Unwanted Medicines: A Resource for Action in Your Community*, PowerPoint presentation). And according a 2008 *Associated Press* Series, antibiotics, anti-convulsants, mood stabilizers and hormones have been found in the drinking supply of 46 million Americans and have been detected in the drinking water of 24 major metropolitan areas (*Disposal of Unwanted Medicines: A Resource for Action in Your Community*, PowerPoint presentation).

## **IMPROPER MEDICINE DISPOSAL CAN LEAD TO *disastrous results***

- A 4-year old child was found not breathing by her grandparents in their home. Resuscitation was attempted, but was ineffective, and the child died. During the autopsy, a transdermal fentanyl patch, a strong opioid pain medicine, was found in the child's gastrointestinal tract. Apparently, the child found a discarded patch in the trash and ingested it, resulting in a massive overdose of fentanyl.
- A 2-year old child was found in her home rubbing her mouth and staggering. Before entering the house, she had been playing outside and her parent, based on her behavior, believed that she had ingested something. Additional symptoms, including tiredness and abdominal pain, later emerged. She was brought to the ER and her physical examination revealed no remarkable signs of distress. The child was discharged to her parent's care. The following morning, the child was found unresponsive. Emergency services were called. The child was pronounced dead upon arrival to the hospital. A blood sample taken around the time of death was positive for oxycodone.



# take ACTION

Drug take-back programs are important strategies that communities can implement to address a growing concern of what to do with medications when they are no longer needed. These programs offer consumers safe ways to dispose of unused prescription and over-the-counter medications.

This section provides the steps that coalitions need to take to create and implement take-back activities. Supplied are programmatic questions to consider, partner suggestions, program objectives and ideas on what to do if take-back programs are not accessible.

## 1 FRAME OUT YOUR TAKE-BACK PROGRAM

Use this worksheet to create your program. A full-sized version has been placed on your Toolkit CD.

**Frame out your take-back program**  
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QUESTION	CONSIDER
<b>1</b> <b>WHAT MEDICATIONS WILL BE COLLECTED?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Controlled substances: Medications such as Vallium®, OxyContin®, Percocet® and codeine.</li> <li>Vitamins, homeopathic remedies and over-the-counter medications: Non-prescription/non-regulated medications.</li> <li>Needles and sharps: Sometimes not allowed in collection programs.</li> <li>Other items: Consumers may use take-back programs as opportunities to turn in illegal drugs.</li> </ul> <p><i>State Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) offices should be consulted before a take-back program is launched to ensure that state-specific procedures are met.</i></p>
	<b>RESPOND</b>
<b>2</b> <b>WHO SHOULD BE PART OF THE COLLECTION TEAM?</b>	<p><b>CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to federal statutes, a law enforcement officer must supervise the process and be present if controlled substances are collected.</li> <li>Pharmacists or pharmacy technicians should be part of the team so they can accurately separate the controlled from the non-controlled medications.</li> </ul>
	<b>RESPOND</b>
<b>3</b> <b>DOES YOUR STATE HAVE HAZARDOUS WASTE REGULATIONS THAT COULD AFFECT THE TAKE-BACK PROGRAM?</b>	<p><b>CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While unused medications from households are usually exempt from hazardous waste rules, if senior centers, clinics or other community-based organizations participate in the program, state and federal rules that govern medicine collection may be relevant.</li> <li>Check with the state's waste management agency or DEA office to confirm.</li> </ul>
	<b>RESPOND</b>

RX ABUSE PREVENTION TOOLKIT: from awareness to action [www.PreventRxAbuse.org](http://www.PreventRxAbuse.org)

QUESTION	CONSIDER
<b>4</b> <b>WILL COLLECTION RECORDS BE KEPT?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If workable, keep records of the medicines and other items collected.</li> <li>The most common reporting method is to quantify pounds accumulated.</li> </ul>
	<b>RESPOND</b>
<b>5</b> <b>HOW WILL CONSUMER PRIVACY BE ENSURED?</b>	<p><b>CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain consumer privacy to ensure the credibility of your take-back program.</li> <li>Ask consumers to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Black out contact information from the medicine bottles they submit.</li> <li>Remove the labels altogether from the bottles.</li> <li>Place the medications into a container or bag, and take the bottles home.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<b>RESPOND</b>

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## 2 ENGAGE THE RIGHT PARTNERS

Rx disposal touches many sectors. And coalitions have the opportunity to cast a wide net to engage the right partners. Consider the following possibilities, and choose those partners who would be best suited for your program:

*Local chapters of:*

**American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)**

[www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

**American Hospital Association (AHA)**

[www.aha.org](http://www.aha.org)

**American Medical Association (AMA)**

[www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)

**American Nurses Associations**

[www.nursingworld.org](http://www.nursingworld.org)

**American Pharmaceutical Association (APhA)**

[www.pharmacist.com](http://www.pharmacist.com)

**American Water Works Association (AWWA)**

[www.awwa.org](http://www.awwa.org)

**Hospitals for a Healthy Environment**

[cms.h2e-online.org/about](http://cms.h2e-online.org/about)

**National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS)**

[www.nacds.org](http://www.nacds.org)

**National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP)**

[www.nabp.net](http://www.nabp.net)

**National Community Pharmacists Association**

[www.ncpanet.org](http://www.ncpanet.org)

**National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE)**

[www.talkaboutrx.org/index.jsp](http://www.talkaboutrx.org/index.jsp)

**National Sheriff's Association's TRIAD program**

(reduces victimization and fear of crime among older adults) [www.sheriffs.org/programs/Triad.asp](http://www.sheriffs.org/programs/Triad.asp)

**Product Stewardship Institute**

[www.productstewardship.us](http://www.productstewardship.us)

*Local offices of Federal agencies:*

**Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services**

[www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov)

**Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)**

[www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

**National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Sea Grant**

[www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov) and [www.seagrants.noaa.gov](http://www.seagrants.noaa.gov)

**National Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**

[www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)

**U.S. DEA local Diversion Field Offices**

[www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/offices\\_n\\_dirs/fielddiv/index.html](http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/offices_n_dirs/fielddiv/index.html)

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)

**U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**

[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

**U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)**

[www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA hospitals) (VA)**

[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

*State agencies:*

Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program/Regional

Hazardous Waste Management Programs

Boards of Pharmacy

Dental Associations

Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP)

Departments of Public Health

Departments of Public Works

*Local government agencies:*

Departments on Aging

Boards of Health

Fire Departments

Health Districts

Sanitation Districts

Sheriff's Offices and other local law enforcement agencies

Solid Waste Management Districts (SWMDs)

*Healthcare and other organizations:*

Family practitioners

Hospital pharmacies

Local pharmacies

Poison Control Centers

Public and Private Universities

Religious Groups

Veterinary Organizations

Wastewater Treatment Plants

Water Reclamation Districts

## 3 BUILD THE FRAMEWORK

Take-back programs have to be easy. The goal is to get people to depend on the take-back program when needs arise. As such, coalitions need to:

- Recruit the local DEA or police department to staff your take-back event. These partners are critical if you are collecting controlled medications.
- Ensure that take-back programs are scheduled when people are available, i.e., after work, in the evenings or on the weekends. The locations must be accessible. Many communities choose pharmacies, police departments and waste disposal sites as likely candidates.
- Plan collection days on a regularly scheduled basis.
- Create community outreach campaigns that explain when, where and how to dispose the pharmaceuticals, as well as the type of medicines that will be accepted.

### During the Collection

- Some medications pose serious safety and health risks to the people who are on the collecting end.

For example, the dust from pharmaceuticals could be harmful if inhaled.

- Develop procedures that address the problem of coming in contact with these medications, similar to those that apply in a laboratory or a chemistry class.

### After Collections

- Medications collected through take-programs are typically incinerated. Contact waste haulers in your community who handle pharmaceuticals.

### Adhere to Federal Guidelines for Proper Rx Disposal

- Coalitions should recommend that consumers follow the *Federal Guidelines for the Proper Disposal of Prescription Drugs* when take-back programs are not available or in-between collections, created by The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP).

## 4 PROVIDE GUIDANCE WHEN TAKE-BACK PROGRAMS ARE NOT AVAILABLE

The Federal government's Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has created the following guidelines that consumers can use to dispose of their medications when take-back programs are not accessible. Coalitions should feel free to disseminate this information even if they have active take-back programs. A PDF version of the following guidelines is provided in the *Learn More* section of this **Tutorial**.

### Federal Guidelines for the Proper Disposal of Prescription Drugs

Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet or drain unless the label or accompanying patient information specifically instructs you to do so. For information on drugs that should be flushed visit the [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).

1. To dispose of prescription drugs not labeled to be flushed, take advantage of community drug take-back programs or other programs, such as household hazardous waste collection events, that collect drugs at a central location for proper disposal. 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.

2. If a drug take-back or collection program is not available:
  - Take your prescription drugs out of their original containers.
  - Mix drugs with an undesirable substance, such as cat litter or used coffee grounds.
  - Put the mixture into a disposable container with a lid, such as an empty margarine tub, or into a sealable bag.
  - Conceal or remove any personal information, including Rx number, on the empty containers by covering it with black permanent marker or duct tape, or by scratching it off.
  - Place the sealed container with the mixture, and the empty drug containers, in the trash.

Office of National Drug Control Policy, October 2009

# learn more

**CRG Medical Foundation for Patient Safety's  
U.S. National Registry for Unused or Expired  
Medications—Questionnaire for Returned  
Medications by Individual Donor and Unused &  
Expired Medicine Registry Collection Event Return  
Form© (Both forms are on one PDF)**

[www.iisgcp.org/unwantedmeds/toolkit/3fregistryreportingforms.pdf](http://www.iisgcp.org/unwantedmeds/toolkit/3fregistryreportingforms.pdf)

**Dispose My Meds**

[www.disposemymeds.org](http://www.disposemymeds.org)

**Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant's Disposal of Unwanted  
Medicines: A Resource for Action in Your Community**

[www.iisgcp.org/unwantedmeds/index.html](http://www.iisgcp.org/unwantedmeds/index.html)

**Medicine Return.com**

[www.medicinereturn.com](http://www.medicinereturn.com)

**Northeast Recycling Council's (NERC)'s Operating  
Unwanted Medication Collections—A  
Legal & Safe Approach**

[www.nerc.org/documents/operating\\_unwanted\\_medication\\_collections\\_final\\_2006.pdf](http://www.nerc.org/documents/operating_unwanted_medication_collections_final_2006.pdf)

**Pacific NW Pollution Prevention Resource Center  
(PPRC)**

[www.pprc.org](http://www.pprc.org)

**Safe Drug Disposal NW**

[www.safedrugdisposalnw.com](http://www.safedrugdisposalnw.com)

**The Drug Take-Back Network**

[www.takebacknetwork.com/index.html](http://www.takebacknetwork.com/index.html)

**The Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey's  
Operation Medicine Cabinet**

[www.drugfreenj.org/amcc](http://www.drugfreenj.org/amcc)

**U.S. DEA's Reverse Distributors Directory  
(lists companies that accept unused/expired  
pharmaceuticals and hazardous wastes)**

[www.iisgcp.org/unwantedmeds/toolkit/3gdearevdistdirectory.pdf](http://www.iisgcp.org/unwantedmeds/toolkit/3gdearevdistdirectory.pdf)

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the American  
Pharmacists Association, and the Pharmaceutical  
Research and Manufacturers of America's SMARxT  
DISPOSAL campaign**

[www.smarxtdisposal.net](http://www.smarxtdisposal.net)

**U.S. Food and Drug Administration's FDA  
Medication Disposal: Questions and Answers,  
Medicines Recommended for Disposal by Flushing**

[www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186188.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186188.htm)

**U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy's Federal  
Guidelines for the Proper Disposal of Prescription Drugs**

[www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/prescrip\\_disposal.pdf](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/prescrip_disposal.pdf)



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[www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)



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