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- Many pharmacies have drop boxes for getting rid of medications.
- Pharmacies may provide drug mail back envelopes to return medications to a company will destroy them.
- Check the DEA Public Disposal Tool for drop box locations.
- Check the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) flush list to see if the medication can be flushed.
- If the medication is not able to be flushed, place them into a bag or container with cat litter, coffee grounds, or dirt. Then throw them into the trash.
- Scratch off all information from the prescription labels before throwing the bottle away.

Many people have bottles and packages of medication they do not need. Some medications may have expired and are no longer safe to take. This includes prescription medications and over the counter medications. People may not know what to do with them. It is important to know how to get rid of these unwanted medications. Correct disposal helps protect children, pets, and other people. Some medications can be harmful if they are taken by those they are not meant for.

The best way to get rid of medications is to take them to a drug take back location as soon as possible¹

- Many pharmacies and government buildings have drop boxes for medication disposal. See “DEA Public Disposal Location Search Tool” in resources below for website link to find locations.
- The DEA also hosts National Prescription Drug Take Back Events two times per year. People can bring their unused medication to these events. Call the DEA Diversion Control Division Registration Call center for more information. (Phone number is in resources below).²
- Many police stations and fire stations have drop boxes for unused medication.
- Pharmacies have information about local medication disposal options. Pharmacies may also provide drug mail back envelopes to return medications to a company that is responsible for destroying the medications.
- Beginning 3/31/25, pharmacies will provide pre-paid envelopes, only for opioid prescriptions. Medications will be returned to the manufacturer for destruction.
- A google search for “medication disposal near me,” can find nearby places for disposal.

What if a take back location is not near me?

- Taking medication to a take back location or mailing medication using a pre-paid drug mail back envelope is preferred when possible.
- If that is not an option, check the FDA Flush List. It is ok to flush the medication ONLY if it is on this list. (See “FDA Flush List” in resources below for website link).³

Or

- If the medication is not on the FDA flush list, get rid of the medication in the trash. Follow these simple instructions:
 1. Remove the medication from its original container.
 2. Mix the medication with an unpleasant substance. You can use dirt, coffee grounds, or cat litter. Do NOT do this if the medication says, “do not crush.”
 3. Put this mix into a closed plastic bag or plastic container with a lid. These include empty coffee cans, laundry soap bottles, milk jugs, or soda bottles. You could also use the prescription bottle with the label removed or scratched out.
 4. Throw the container into the trash. Be sure the trash is safe from animals and children.

Tips for Disposal

- Scratch out all personal information on the label of the empty pill bottle or medication package. Make sure it can't be read. Then throw the bottle into the trash.
- Some states have passed laws to allow for donation of unopened medication. They are donated to charitable clinics or hospitals to give to eligible patients. Check with the local pharmacy or your doctor for details and laws on donations.
- Some medications such as sprays, lozenges, inhalers and patches may have specific instructions. Ask your health care provider to find out how to dispose of these medications.
- You can also get rid of sharps or needles. The FDA says to place all sharps or needles in a sharps container right after use. The rules on how to get rid of sharps disposal containers depends on where you live.⁴ Check with your local health department or trash removal services. Some drop off sites include:
 - Drop boxes at police stations, fire stations, health departments, hospitals, or doctor's offices.
 - Hazardous waste collection sites.
 - Mail-back programs.
 - Local special waste pick up.



Go online to find more information about medication disposal and to view the references for this toolkit.

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