
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Emptying the Medicine Cabinet: Disposal Guidelines for Pharmaceuticals in the Home

For several years, people concerned about environmental pollution, drug abuse and accidental poisonings have provided specific guidance on how to best dispose of medicine based on the particular interest they represent. Oftentimes, the approach to disposing medicine promoted by various interests contradicted one another. In 2009, stakeholders representing these interests came together to develop an approach for disposing of medicine that is mutually acceptable. The approach for the disposal of medicine promotes not storing unneeded medicine, not flushing medicine or pouring down the drain, rendering medicine unusable and disposing of unneeded medicine in an appropriate manner as described below.



Take your unneeded or expired medication from your household to a drop box at a local police station. A list of these locations can be found at <http://www.nh.gov/medsafety>. Additionally, the US Drug Enforcement Administration coordinates a National Drug Take Back Day almost 100 locations throughout New Hampshire every April and October. Lastly, some pharmacies have established medication disposal kiosks.

In addition to the options above, medicine from households can be disposed of in household trash using the following method:

- 1) Pour medicine into a sealable plastic bag.
- 2) If the medicine is a solid, add a small amount of water to dissolve it.
- 3) Add coffee grounds, kitty litter or something similar to the liquid medicine in the plastic bag.
- 4) Seal the bag and immediately dispose of it in the trash.
- 5) Use a marker to black out any personal contact information on the empty medicine container prior to disposing of it in the trash.

Flushing medicine down the toilet or drain is never advised unless accompanying product information instructs it is safe to do so. Stakeholders developing the medicine disposal policy also stated it is important that unneeded medications not be kept in the home. Additionally, all medicine should be stored securely when in the home. The approach for medicine disposal described above does not apply to institutions or for medicine obtained at centralized collection events. Federal and state laws and

regulations dictate how certain types of medicine in these facilities should be managed, stored and disposed of.

To reduce the amount of waste pharmaceuticals:

1. Only purchase what you need. Why waste money on pharmaceuticals to just sit on the shelf and expire over time?
2. Say “No” to samples if you are not going to use them. You will only need to dispose of them later.
3. Stop junk mail. Take your name off mailing lists so you don’t receive free sample products, such as pain relievers. If you don’t use them, then you will need to dispose of them later. Visit www.des.nh.gov and search on “junk mail” to find out how.
4. Centralize all pharmaceuticals in one location. This may help to limit over purchasing of products you already have.

Intravenous Bags

While people within their home may legally dispose of hazardous waste in their household trash, use good judgment to decide on the proper disposal of intravenous bags containing chemotherapy agents. To assure these wastes are not discharged to the ground, surface water, ground water, or air:

1. Remove sharps and dispose of them with other household generated sharps.
2. If the bag is empty, discard it in the trash or recycle it.
3. If the bag contains a fluid, return the IV bag to a home care provider, pharmacy or other medical provider. They can dispose of the waste safely and properly.
4. Chemotherapy agents should not be disposed of in trash or poured down the drain.



Household Generated Sharps

Household generated sharps may be disposed of in the solid waste, provided:

1. Sharps are enclosed inside rigid, puncture-resistant containers.
2. Containers encasing sharps are sealed and labeled “not for recycling.”

Certain containers found in the household, particularly plastic bleach and laundry detergent containers are satisfactory to ensure the safe disposal of sharps. Also, containers can be purchased that are specifically designed for the disposal of sharps. Before placing a container of sharps in the trash, reinforce the lid with heavy-duty tape and place the container in a securely fastened plastic bag. For more information, review the NHDES fact sheet WMD-SW-31 Disposal Tips for Household Generated Sharps.

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-0660 or brandon.kernen@des.nh.gov. For more information or in case of an accidental poisoning, call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222. More information about safe medicine disposal or pharmaceuticals in the environment can be found at www.nh.gov/medsafety.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of August 2019. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.