

POISON CONTROL

VOLUME 4

Safe disposal of Old Medicines at Home, Tips for Parents and Caregivers

Introduction

In every household, it's not uncommon to find a stash of old medicines kept in a cabinet or drawer. While these medications may have served their purpose in the past, their presence raises concerns about safety, especially in homes with children because expired medicines can lose their efficacy and, more importantly, may become hazardous. Children are particularly vulnerable to accidental poisoning as they may mistake medications for candy or inadvertently ingest them. Proper disposal of old medicines is crucial to prevent accidental ingestion, environmental pollution, and to ensure the overall well-being of families. In this article, we will explore the importance of poisoning control and provide valuable tips for parents and caregivers on how to safely dispose of old medicines at home.

The Dangers of Keeping Old Medicines

Unused or expired medications, may pose various risks within a household, particularly when there are children present. Accidental ingestion of expired or inappropriate medications can result in serious health consequences, ranging from mild reactions to life-threatening emergencies. Moreover, they may not be as effective in treating illnesses, potentially leading to inadequate care.

How Can We Safely Dispose of Medicines?



1. Check for Local disposal programs/ Drug take-back programs:

The best way to dispose of your medicines is to use drug take-back programs. Many communities have established programs for safe medication disposal. Check with local pharmacies, healthcare facilities, or waste management services to get information on available take-back programs in your area.

2. Follow Medication Guidelines:

Refer to the medication packaging or accompanying leaflet for specific disposal instructions. Some medications come with specific disposal recommendations, and following these guidelines ensures that the drugs are disposed of in an environmentally friendly manner.

3. Return to your local pharmacy:

This is a convenient option if drug take-back programs are not available. Several pharmacies accept expired medications, but each pharmacy may have a unique policy. Please reach out to your pharmacy to determine whether they accept expired medications.

4. Household Disposal:

If take-back programs or pharmacy disposal are not available, you can dispose of medications at home. Some drugs can be disposed of in the trash, as long as these safety measures are observed:

- First, mix the medications with an unpalatable substance such as dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds. However, do not crush the tablets or capsules.
- Place the mixture in a container such as a zip-lock or sealable plastic bag, and throw the container in the household trash.
- Ensure you protect your privacy by removing/scratching off all personal information printed on the empty pill bottle or medicine packaging before disposing of it.

HOW DO I USE SAFE DISPOSAL?



1. Remove the medication from its original container or package.



2. Mix with an unpleasant substance such as dirt, kitty litter, or used coffee grounds. Do not crush tablets or capsules.



3. Put the mixture into a container you can close. This can be an empty food container or a sealable bag.



4. Conceal or remove the label and all personal details from prescription bottles, vials, or other packages.

5. All the above is now safe to place in the trash.

5. Flush Medications:

Certain medications should not be discarded in the trash; instead, it is preferable to dispose of them by flushing them down the toilet. Usually, prescription medicines should not be flushed down the toilet unless the label on the container tells you to do so.

While the flushing of medications is generally discouraged, specific drugs pose potential risks if retained at home after use, necessitating prompt disposal when they are no longer required. For instance, certain painkillers like hydrocodone and morphine sulfate fall into this category and should be flushed rather than stored in a medicine cabinet.

If a take-back program is not available in your area, a list of medicines that can be flushed is found below.

- buprenorphine
- oxycodone
- fentanyl
- oxymorphone
- hydromorphone
- tapentadol
- meperidine
- sodium oxybate
- methadone
- diazepam rectal gel
- morphine
- methylphenidate transdermal (Daytrana®)

Tips for Parents and Caregivers:

1. Regular Medication Inventory:

Conduct regular checks of your medicine cabinet and remove any expired or unused medications. This practice reduces the chances of accidental ingestion and ensures that only necessary medications are kept in the household.

2. Educate Children:

Teach them that medications are not toys, and only adults should handle and administer them. Instill the importance of never taking any medication without supervision and explaining the potential dangers of doing so.

3. Secure Medications:

Keep all medications, both current and expired, out of the reach of children. Consider using child-resistant packaging and storing medications in high or locked cabinets.

4. Know Emergency Numbers:

Familiarize yourself with local poison control center numbers and emergency contacts. In case of accidental ingestion, quick action can make a significant difference.

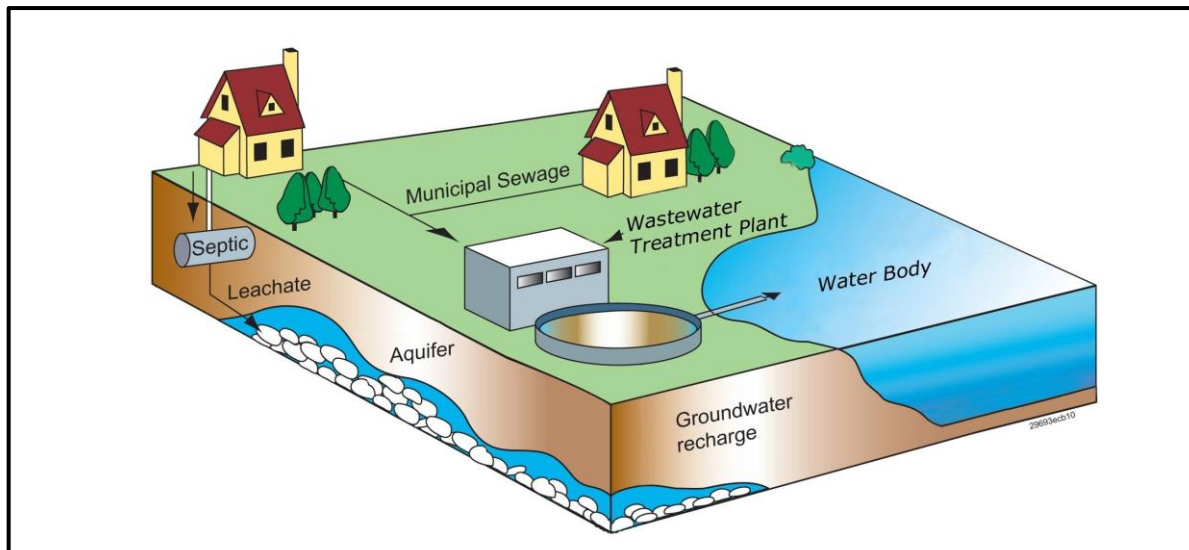
How Proper Disposal of Medicines Protects You and the Earth

- Prevents poisoning of children and pets.
- Deters misuse by teenagers and adults.
- Avoids health problems from accidentally taking the wrong medicine, too much of the same medicine, or a medicine that is too old to work well.
- Keeps medicines from entering streams and rivers when poured down the drain or flushed down the toilet.

How Improper Disposal of Medicines May End Up in Our Drinking Water Sources

In homes that use septic tanks, prescription and over-the-counter drugs flushed down the toilet can leach into the ground and seep into ground water.

In cities and towns where residences are connected to wastewater treatment plants, prescription and over-the-counter drugs poured down the sink or flushed down the toilet can pass through the treatment system and enter rivers and lakes. They may flow downstream to serve as sources for community drinking water supplies. Water treatment plants are generally not equipped to routinely remove medicines.



What Prescribers Can Do

Prescribers contribute significantly to promoting responsible prescription use. By prescribing the necessary amount of medication for a specific treatment episode and regularly reviewing medications for chronic disease management, they can reduce the chances of patients having unused medication after treatment. Moreover, prescribers can serve as educators, aiding patients in understanding the importance of adhering to their prescribed medication regimen.

Conclusion

Properly managing and disposing of old medicines is a fundamental aspect of home safety, especially for families with children. By following these tips for safe disposal and educating both children and caregivers about the risks associated with old medications, we can contribute to creating a healthier and safer environment within our homes. Taking these precautions ensures that our households remain free from potential poisoning risks and that we contribute to the overall well-being of our communities.

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