

Common Questions

What is SMARxT DISPOSAL?

SMARxT DISPOSAL™ is a public awareness campaign that targets medication consumers to providing guidance on proper disposal of unused and or expired prescription and over-the-counter medications. **SMARxT DISPOSAL™** also raises awareness about the potential environmental impacts from improperly disposed medications. This national campaign unites diverse interests from the health care profession, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and conservation community and encourages each to use their unique strengths and diverse communication networks to communicate with medication consumers.



How do pharmaceutical ingredients get into the environment?

Pharmaceuticals detected in surface waters come primarily from patient use. Small amounts of medicines pass through the human body without being metabolized completely and make their way to surface waters through the municipal wastewater treatment system. In addition, people in the past have flushed unused or expired medications, or poured them down the drain.

Why is proper disposal of medications important?

Properly disposing of unused medications by NOT flushing them or NOT pouring them down the drain is one small step we can take to keep our waterways clean.

What, exactly, am I being asked to do?

- DO NOT FLUSH unused medications and DO NOT POUR them down a sink or drain*.
- Be Proactive and Dispose of Unused Medication In Household Trash. When discarding unused medications, ensure you protect children and pets from potentially negative effects:
 1. Pour medication into a sealable plastic bag. If medication is a solid (pill, liquid capsule, etc.), crush it or add water to dissolve it.
 2. Add kitty litter, sawdust, coffee grounds (or any material that mixes with the medication and makes it less appealing for pets and children to eat) to the plastic bag.
 3. Seal the plastic bag and put it in the trash.
 4. Remove and destroy ALL identifying personal information (prescription label) from all medication containers before recycling them or throwing them away.
- Check for Approved State and Local Collection Programs. Another option is to check for approved state and local collection alternatives such as community based household hazardous waste collection programs. In certain states, you may be able to take your unused medications to your community pharmacy or other location for disposal.
- Consult your pharmacist with any questions.

If flushing medication is so bad, why was it recommended to begin with?

At one time, flushing was believed to be the safest way to dispose of medicine. Flushing medication was thought to protect children and pets from accidental ingestion of unused medication and decrease the chance of the medication being misused.

If I flush medicines down the toilet or pour them down the sink don't they get removed at the wastewater treatment plant?

New technology is capable of detecting low concentrations of chemical wastes, including small amounts of pharmaceuticals. These studies have shown municipal wastewater treatment facilities do not remove small amounts of pharmaceutical wastes and their by-products. However, studies show that those trace amounts have no appreciable risk on human health.

What are the medications of concern?

Any prescription or over the counter medication. There is no easy way to identify a particular medicine that may be harmful if flushed or poured down the sink so the best approach is not to flush any.

Why can't I just dump pills into my kitchen trash can? Do I really need to go thru all those steps?

Unfortunately, when pills are just thrown in the trash, it can lead to unintended exposure to people or animals. People may go through the trash to obtain unused medications or personal information found on discarded prescription bottles. This is called "dumpster diving." Additionally, if trash is not securely closed, scavenging animals may accidentally eat discarded medicines along with food items they find in the garbage or at a landfill. Also, trash occasionally spills, allowing loose pills to reach the environment where they could pose a risk to fish and wildlife. The extra steps we recommend, including removal of personal information from medication containers, provide a safer method of disposing of unused or expired medications.

I have medicines in my cabinet that expired months, or even years, ago. Can I just dump those down the toilet?

The expiration date on medications is the date at which the manufacturer can still guarantee the safety and full potency of the medication. However, if stored properly, medications can remain effective (biologically active) for months or even years after the expiration date. Therefore, we also recommend you follow our **SMAR_xT DISPOSAL™** guidelines for disposing of expired medicines. Important note: Never take an expired medication without checking with your pharmacist first.

What is known about the impacts of medication in water on fish?

Most scientists that have evaluated current published data have concluded there appear to be no appreciable short-term aquatic life effects due to pharmaceuticals in the environment. However, work continues on evaluating long-term effects in order to refine these assessments. One area of focused effort is certain hormones because they are potentially a class of compounds with observable effects at environmentally relevant concentrations. Scientific knowledge of the potential

long-term effects of pharmaceuticals in the environment on plant and wildlife is in the early stages of development.

Is there a human health concern about medications in the water?

Studies conducted to date suggest it is unlikely that the quantities of pharmaceuticals detected in the environment are harmful to human health.

Why are the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), American Pharmacists Association (APhA) and Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) working together?

FWS, APhA and PhRMA agree that medications play a vital role in our society. In addition, we agree that it is important to protect our families and our natural resources, including our waterways, fish and other aquatic organisms. Because of these commonly-held beliefs, we are collaborating to design and implement a communications strategy to educate the public about appropriate medication disposal and the natural resource benefits of these actions.

Is disposal via household trash the best way to dispose of unused and expired medication?

SMAR_xT DISPOSAL™ focuses on what we can do collectively and individually to ensure that unused medications are not flushed or poured down the drain. Current best science indicates that that disposal via household trash as described by the SMAR_xT DISPOSAL™ program is an appropriate method.

*Note: The FDA advises that the following drugs be flushed down the toilet instead of thrown in the trash: Actiq (fentanyl citrate)	
Daytrana Transdermal Patch (methylphenidate)	Duragesic Transdermal System (fentanyl)
OxyContin Tablets (oxycodone)	Avinza Capsules (morphine sulfate)
Baraclude Tablets (entecavir)	Reyataz Capsules (atazanavir sulfate)
Tequin Tablets (gatifloxacin)	Zerit for Oral Solution (stavudine)
Meperidine HCl Tablets	Percocet (Oxycodone and Acetaminophen)
Xyrem (Sodium Oxybate)	Fentora (fentanyl buccal tablet)
Additional Note: Patients should always refer to printed material accompanying their medication for specific instructions.	

Who should I contact if I have more questions about the SMARxT Disposal campaign?

FWS Questions:

1-800-344-WILD (9453)
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive
Arlington, Virginia 22203
<http://www.fws.gov/contaminants/>

APhA contact:

Sharon Corbitt
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<http://www.APhAnet.org>

PhRMA contact:

Kaelan Hollon
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