

Safe Medication Disposal in the Community

The 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that 14.4 million Americans misused prescription psychotherapeutic drugs during the previous year, with 8.6 million Americans misusing prescription pain relievers.¹ A 2023 cohort study found that having access to recent fills of prescription opioid medications in the household was associated with a 60% increase in the odds of an opioid-related overdose among other household members.² Safe medication storage and prompt disposal of expired, unwanted or unused medications can help reduce the chance of inadvertent exposure or intentional diversion of medications.^{2,3}

Drug take-back programs, such as the National Prescription Drug Take Back Day hosted by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), provide the public with thousands of collection sites across the country where unneeded medications can be safely and properly disposed of. The event takes place twice a year, in April and October. More information on the next National Prescription Drug Take Back Day is available at <https://takebackday.dea.gov>.^{3,4}

DEA-authorized collectors are also available year-round. These include retail pharmacies, hospital or clinic pharmacies, and law enforcement facilities.³ Prescription (schedule II–V controlled and non-controlled substances) and over-the-counter medications can be dropped off at no charge regardless of where they were obtained. Illicit drugs, needles and syringes, auto-injectors, iodine-containing medications, chemotherapy and cytotoxic medications, aerosols, inhalers, liquids, and dietary supplements are not accepted.⁵ Participating locations can be found at <https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch>.⁶

If there are no take-back events or disposal units available in the area and no specific instructions in the product package insert, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides the following guidance:³

- Check the FDA flush list for drugs that should be flushed down the toilet. The FDA flush list is specific to formulations associated with brand names and corresponding generics listed in Table 1.
- For medications not on the flush list:
 - Remove medication from the original container and scratch out any personal information on the label
 - Mix medication with an unpalatable substance such as used coffee grounds, dirt or cat litter
 - Place the mixture in a sealable bag and dispose both the mixture and original container in household trash

Table 1. FDA Flush List for Certain Medications.³

Active Ingredient	Brand Names
Benzhydrocodone	Apadaz
Buprenorphine	Belbuca, Bunavail, Butrans, Suboxone, Subutex, Zubsolv
Diazepam	Diastat/Diastat AcuDial (rectal gel)
Fentanyl	Abstral, Actiq, Duragesic, Fentora, Onsolis
Hydrocodone	Hysingla ER, Norco, Reprexain, Vicodin, Vicodin ES, Vicodin HP, Vicoprofen, Zohydro ER
Hydromorphone	Exalgo
Meperidine	Demerol
Methadone	Dolophine, Methadose
Methylphenidate	Daytrana (transdermal patch system)
Morphine	Arymo ER, Avinza, Embeda, Kadian, MorphaBond ER, MS Contin, Oramorph SR
Oxycodone	Codaxy, Combunox, Oxaydo, Oxycet, OxyContin, Percocet, Percodan, Roxicet, Roxicodone, Roxilox, RoxyBond, Targiniq ER, Troxyca ER, Tylox, Xartemis XR, Xtampza ER
Oxymorphone	Opana, Opana ER
Sodium Oxybate	Xyrem, Xywav
Tapentadol	Nucynta, Nucynta ER

References

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