



# What Should I Do with Old or Unused Medicine

**NEVER FLUSH OR POUR UNUSED MEDICINE DOWN THE DRAIN !**

Wastewater treatment plants and septic systems are not designed to remove medications from wastewater. Pouring drugs down the drain can send that medication to area lakes and streams.

In addition, it is illegal and potentially deadly to give your prescription medications to a friend or relative. Keep reading for more information and for what you can do to help!

## Disposal

Never dispose of medications by flushing them down the drain or toilet. You can put unused or expired medications in the garbage. If you do that:

- Seal the original child-proof container with tape, or
- Crush the pills and put them into a container with old coffee grounds or something that kids would never eat.
- Put in a plastic bag within your regular garbage. You may want to black out any personal identification with a marker.

Wisconsin has a special program for cancer and chronic disease treatment drugs where unopened, recent prescriptions can be donated to participating pharmacies or medical facilities for use by other patients. The WI Department of Health and Family Services administers this program. For more information visit

<http://www.dhfs.wi.gov/bqaconsumer/cancerdrugrepsy.htm>

## How Does Unused Medicine Get Into the Environment?

- Flushing it down the toilet
- Pouring it down the drain
- Passing unabsorbed medications that you take
- Waste from pets and farm animals treated with medications

Recent research shows small traces of pharmaceuticals are getting into lakes, rivers and streams, leading to adverse affects on fish and other aquatic species.

## Should we be concerned?

Small amounts of antibiotics, anti-depressants, veterinary drugs, birth control hormones and ibuprofen have been detected in waterways across the United States. Research suggests that the hormones found in pharmaceuticals may cause abnormalities in the reproductive cycles of fish. Antibiotics that are present may also lead to the development of drug-resistant germs, which are linked to antibiotic-resistant bacteria. More research still needs to be done to determine the effects of long-term human exposure, as well as how drugs get into waterways, but the available research suggests that we need to keep medicines out of our waterways.

## Long Term Issues

There is no statewide or nationwide comprehensive unused drug disposal program. Special one-day collections for the public to safely return unused medicines raise awareness, but they are not a long-term sustainable solution. As a national dialogue on pharmaceutical waste continues, additional options for management of expired or unwanted medications may become available. County staff is participating on a state working group to develop consistent educational messages and test other models for collection that would be ongoing and sustainable.

Some groups are working on a model called “Product Stewardship” where companies that manufacture certain products take responsibility for proper disposal. The concept is to work with state and local government agencies, manufacturers, retailers, environmental groups, federal agencies, and other key stakeholders to reduce the health and environmental impacts of consumer products. For more information about how this could work visit:

[www.productstewardship.us](http://www.productstewardship.us)  
[www.productstewardship.net](http://www.productstewardship.net)

## Where can I get more information?

- Wisconsin DNR <http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/pharm/household.htm>
- [No Drugs Down the Drain – Outreach program in California](#)
- USGS website <http://toxics.usgs.gov/regional/emc/>
- [U.S. Geological Society Research Article: Pharmaceuticals, hormones, and other organic wastewater contaminants in U.S. streams, 1999-2000: a national reconnaissance](#)
- Wisconsin researches endocrine disrupters in surface water and groundwater- Source: UW Aquatic Sciences Chronicle <http://www.aqua.wisc.edu/Chronicle/Default.aspx?tabid=284>
- Governing Magazine article Sept. 2006, “Prozac in the Water”

<http://www.governing.com/archive/2006/sep/drugs.txt>