

Safe Drug Disposal

June 2025

When to dispose of unused medication:

Many people have unused or expired prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medicines at home. You should get rid of medication when:

- Your health care provider changes your prescription but you have unused medicine left
- You feel better and your provider says you should stop taking the medication
- You have OTC medicines that you no longer need
- You have medication that are past their expiration dates

Storing expired or unwanted medication can increase the risk of⁷:

- Taking the wrong medication due to mix up
- Accidental poisoning in children or pets
- Overdose
- Misuse or illegal abuse

How to safely dispose of unused or expired medication:

The best way to dispose of most types of unused or expired medication (both prescription and OTC) is to use a take-back option¹. The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy has a nationwide drug disposal locator tool available on [AWAREx.org](https://www.awarex.org).

If a take-back location is not readily available, you can follow the at-home disposal method shown in the image.

DO NOT FLUSH UNWANTED MEDICATIONS

Research shows that pharmaceuticals entering the environment through flushing or other means negatively affect aquatic ecosystems including fish and animal populations⁴.



Follow these simple steps to dispose of medicines in the household trash*

MIX
Mix medicines (do not crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable substance such as dirt, kitty litter, or used coffee grounds;

PLACE
Place the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag;

THROW
Throw the container in your household trash;

SCRATCH OUT
Scratch out all personal information on the prescription label of your empty pill bottle or empty medicine packaging to make it unreadable, then dispose of the container.

* For more information on safe medicine disposal, go to FDA's "Disposal of Unused Medicines: What You Should Know" web page.

Image Source: [FDA.gov](https://www.fda.gov)

Safe disposal of household needles or sharps

Each year, thousands of people across Indiana use needles, syringes, and lancets—also called sharps—for home injections of medications². Sharps disposal by home self-injectors is not regulated in Indiana, and not using the safest disposal methods can lead to haphazard disposal habits and increase community exposure to sharps².

Check your local health department for sharps disposal programs. For example, Marion County Public Health Department has three locations where home-generated sharps can be dropped off at no cost⁶. Additionally, local Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) offer disposal of used sharps and new sharps container⁵. As of 2024, Indiana has SSPs in the following counties: Allen, Tippecanoe, Madison, Wayne, Marion, Fayette, Monroe, and Clark⁶.

You can also visit safeneedledisposal.org to view state/local disposal recommendations for home-generated sharps.



Disposal of illicit substances

It is illegal to give controlled or illicit substances to anyone other than a police officer or a person who is under law enforcement supervision³. Call your local police non-emergency line for assistance.

Sources

1 Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. (2024, October 31). Disposal of unused medicines: What you should know. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know>

2 Community Environmental Health. (2022a, May 27). Household needles and sharps. <https://www.in.gov/idem/health/unwanted-medicines/household-needles-and-sharps/>

3 Community Environmental Health. (2022b, May 27). Unwanted medicines. <https://www.in.gov/idem/health/unwanted-medicines/>

4 Environmental Protection Agency. (2024, November 14). EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/household-medication-disposal/impact-pharmaceuticals-released-environment>

5 HIV/STI/Viral Hepatitis. (2025, April 25). Harm Reduction & Syringe Service Programs. <https://www.in.gov/health/hiv-std-viral-hepatitis/harm-reduction-and-syringe-service-programs/>

6 Sharps Disposal Program. (n.d.). <https://marionhealth.org/sharps-disposal-program/>

7 U.S. National Library of Medicine. (2022, October 10). How and when to get rid of unused medicines: Medlineplus medical encyclopedia. MedlinePlus. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000943.htm>