

This fact sheet on the safe disposal of unwanted and expired medicines is brought to you by the **Nebraska Product Stewardship Coalition (NEPSC)** and the **Product Stewardship Institute (PSI)**.

The **Nebraska Product Stewardship Coalition** is a collaborative organization dedicated to reducing the health and environmental impacts of consumer products.

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## What Should You Do with Leftover Medicine?

The vast majority of unwanted medicines in Nebraska are improperly handled or stored in the home, posing risks of accidental poisoning, prescription drug abuse, and water contamination. **YOU SHOULD NEVER FLUSH LEFTOVER MEDICINE DOWN THE TOILET.** Instead, check with your local pharmacist to see which of the following disposal options are most readily available to you:

### Permanent Collection Sites:

Some pharmacies and law enforcement offices offer drop-boxes to accept unwanted or expired medicines. Restrictions may apply on the types of substances these sites can accept. The Nebraska MEDS coalition web site has a list of pharmacies accepting unwanted pharmaceuticals. Check with each pharmacy for a list of what substances each site accepts.



### One-Day Events:

Pharmacies, government agencies, and law enforcement may sponsor periodic drug take-back events. For more information, contact your local law enforcement office.



### Mail-Back Programs:

Some pharmacies and organizations sell postage-paid envelopes to mail unwanted drugs for safe disposal. Contact your pharmacist or the Nebraska MEDS Coalition to learn more.



### Nebraskans Taking Action on Pharmaceutical Disposal:

#### Nebraska MEDS (Medication Education for Disposal Strategies) Coalition

Government leaders, environmental organizations, and pharmacies in Nebraska are collaborating to increase awareness about the importance of proper medication disposal through the [Nebraska MEDS Disposal Program](#). This coalition has organized take-back programs and offered non-controlled medication collection in pharmacies around Lincoln and Lancaster County through grants from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. In addition, Nebraska MEDS Coalition member, The Nebraska Pharmacist Association, is offering pharmacies across the state non-controlled medication collection through a Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality grant. To learn more or to get involved, contact Dan King at the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at [dnking@lincoln.ne.gov](mailto:dnking@lincoln.ne.gov).

### Other Local Programs:

- Keep Nebraska Beautiful: [knb.org](http://knb.org)
- Nebraska MEDS Coalition: [nebraskameds.org](http://nebraskameds.org)
- Nebraska Pharmacists Association: [npharm.org](http://npharm.org)
- The Groundwater Foundation: [groundwater.org](http://groundwater.org)
- Nebraska Regional Poison Center: [nebraskapoisson.com](http://nebraskapoisson.com) 1-800-222-1222
- Nebraska Product Stewardship Initiative: [productstewardshipnebraska.org](http://productstewardshipnebraska.org)
- Product Stewardship Institute: [productstewardship.us/drugtakeback-locations](http://productstewardship.us/drugtakeback-locations)



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why can't I flush leftover medicine down the toilet?

When flushed, medicines can enter our waterways and potentially contaminate drinking water. Most water treatment plants in the U.S. are not designed to remove pharmaceutical compounds, so trace levels are often detected in treated municipal water supplies.

### What if I can't find a take-back program in my community?

As a last resort, discard any leftover medicines in the household trash by following these guidelines:

- 1) Do not flush leftover medicine down the toilet.
- 2) Instead, mix medicine with an undesirable substance (e.g., cat litter or coffee grounds), as this will discourage abuse.
- 3) Place mixture in a sealable bag or other container. Discard the sealed package with your household trash.
- 4) Remove the label from your pill bottle. Donate the bottle to a local veterinary clinic, recycle if possible, or discard.

### What will happen if I store my prescription meds at home?

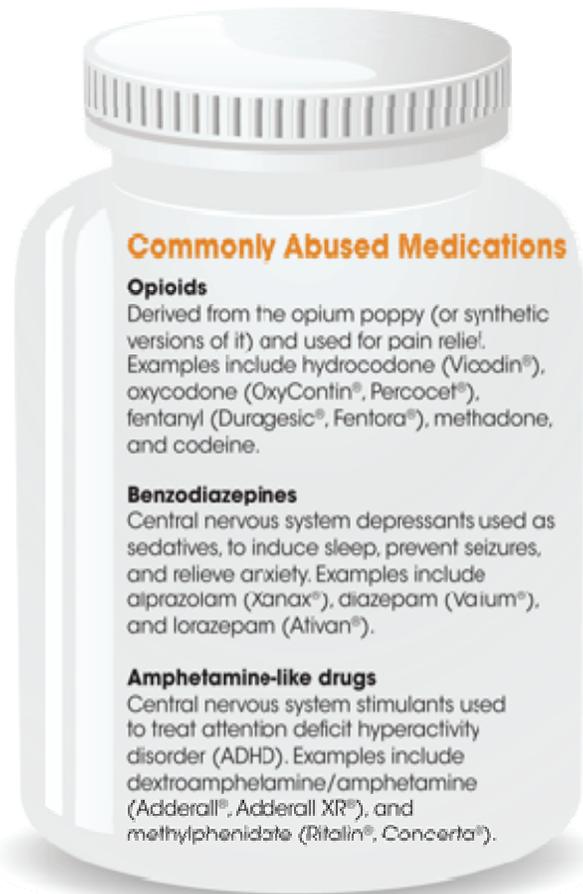
Storing unwanted medicines at home makes it easy for family members, friends, and pets to access them, posing risks of abuse and poisoning. Approximately six out of 10 teenagers agree that prescription drugs are easy to get from parents' medicine cabinets.

### Are accidental medication poisonings a widespread problem?

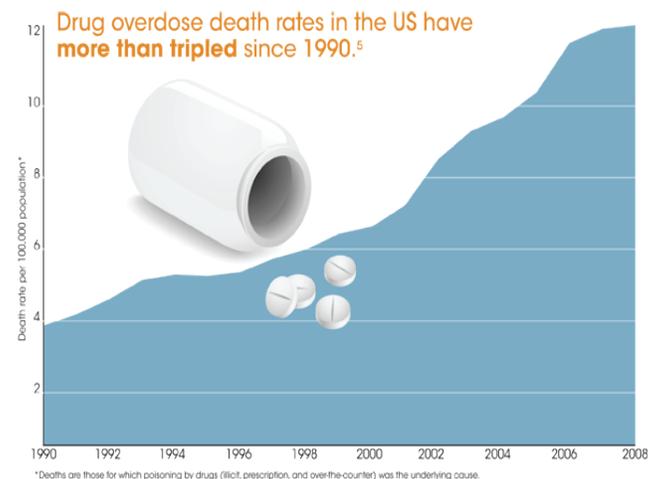
Over 55 percent of poison exposures in Nebraska in 2011 were caused by prescription medicines. Among children, emergency room visits for drug poisonings (excluding misuse or abuse) are twice as common as poisonings from other household products.

### Can I just throw my medicine in the trash?

Pharmaceuticals should be disposed of in the trash **only if no take-back options exist**, and in those cases, they should be placed in sealed containers. Pharmaceutical compounds end up in the liquid that is collected from the bottom of landfills, which is then sent to the same wastewater treatment plants that are unable to neutralize them.



Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013



Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011

### What is product stewardship?

**Product stewardship** is the act of minimizing the social and environmental impacts of a product and its packaging throughout its entire lifecycle. Product stewardship can be either voluntary or required by law. Pharmaceutical take-back programs such as those organized by the Nebraska MEDS Coalition are an example of collaborative, product stewardship solutions that keep communities healthy and safe.



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