



Medication Disposal

Frequently Asked Questions

How does medication get into our water?

When medication is not disposed of properly, it can end up in our lakes, rivers, streams, and ground water. Pharmaceuticals are often discarded by throwing them down a drain, toilet, or carelessly into the trash. Medication gets thrown away for several reasons, including a change in prescription, improvement in patient's health, failure to complete a prescribed course of medication, or an excess amount of pills.

What is wrong with flushing medications down the toilet?

When medications are flushed down the toilet or thrown down the drain, they can end up in our water sources. The long-term effects of these pharmaceuticals and OTC products are currently not fully understood. We do know however, that having pharmaceuticals in the water supply can affect the local environment, including aquatic life.

How does medication in the water affect me? The environment?

Medication that is not disposed of properly can harm humans and wildlife, especially fish and amphibians. Medication that is thrown in the trash may be easy for kids to get into. Thousands of children every year are treated for unintentional ingestion of pharmaceuticals. Pharmaceuticals in the water have been shown to adversely affect wildlife. Trace amounts have been found in some samples of finished drinking water, but the Illinois Department of Public Health and the U.S. EPA do not believe it to endanger public health.

Why are there unused medicines?

We rely heavily on pharmaceuticals in our current medical system. Drug consumption in the U.S. has grown 109% from 2000-2004. 4 out of 5 patients leave their doctor's office with at least one prescription. Doctors often discontinue medications, causing others to go unused. Consumers also purchase certain drugs in large quantities that eventually expire. A recent take-back program in San Francisco found the average household had 2.7 pounds of unwanted or expired drugs. Source: Teleosis Institute

Is it ok for me to throw medication in the trash?

Medication that is carelessly thrown in the trash is an easy target for kids. It is also a target for other household members, pets, and even burglars. Aside from these risks, medication that is thrown in a trash bag will eventually end up sitting in a landfill, where it may leach indirectly into the water.

Where can I go to drop off my medications?

If you are a resident of Geneva, you may bring your prescription and over-the-counter medications to the Geneva Police Department: 20 Police Plaza, Geneva, IL



What if I don't live in Geneva?

There may not be a designated site near you, but many towns hold a yearly event just for this purpose. Check with your local area to see if there is an annual drug disposal event. If disposal sites or collection events are not available, there are other ways to dispose of medication. The American Pharmacists Association recommends the following: crush and/or dissolve the medication as best as possible and then mix it with an unappetizing substance such as kitty litter or coffee grounds. Place this mixture in a discreet sealed bag or container (double bagging is recommended to prevent leaching) (Illinois Indiana Sea Grant).

Another helpful hint from the Illinois EPA is to make sure you only buy what is needed from the pharmacy. For example, many pharmacies encourage buying a three-month supply, as compared to a one-month supply. However, a three-month supply is not always needed. Make sure to take all the medication that was prescribed for you; it is better for you and the environment. Never put meds down the toilet or sink!

What is not accepted?

DEA controlled drugs, sharps/needles, IV bags, thermometers and bloody or infectious wastes.

Can I bring back inhalers?

If they are empty you can put them in your regular recycling bins, since they are made of plastic and aluminum

Is it discreet?

Yes. Medications may be brought in unmarked, unidentifiable bags, jars, etc.

Can I just bring medications back to my local pharmacy?

No. The pharmacies in Geneva do not offer a collection program.

How should I transport the medication?

Remove all pills from their original container (except blister packs) by pouring them directly into a plastic bag. All ointments, liquids, etc. can be placed into a plastic bag in the original container. Blister packs can be submitted without being placed in a plastic bag.

What happens to the medications after I drop them off?

The medications will be picked up and delivered to a plant, where they will be incinerated.

Is the disposal method environmentally safe?

Incineration is environmentally safer than other disposal methods. The process is highly regulated by the EPA. It is done in a way that minimizes contamination of air particles.

For more information on medication disposal, please visit: <http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/>