

Q&A for Pharmaceutical Waste Collection Event

How can I properly dispose of my household medications?

Bring household medication waste to the October 16th collection event from 9-3 at the TCAT bus garage: 737 Willow Avenue, Ithaca, N.Y. Willow Avenue is opposite Dey Street, at a light on Route 13.

What if I can't get there on the 16th?

You can store unwanted medications for the next collection event. Be sure they are kept in a location where they will not be readily accessible to others. The date of the next collection has not yet been announced. If safe storage is not possible, follow trash disposal recommendations (below.)

If you can't make it to a collection event, most medications should be taken out of their containers and mixed with used coffee grounds or cat litter, bagged, and put in the trash. A small number of prescription medications are labeled, "flush" since very small doses of these can cause serious harm if taken by someone else.

What if travel is unsafe?

If there is snow or other conditions that make travel unsafe, please stay home. Safely store what you have to the next collection event or, if you can't save them, follow the disposal directions above.

Who is organizing this event?

The Coalition for Safe Medication Disposal (CSMD) is the organizer. The CSMD includes representatives from the Tompkins County Sheriff, Tompkins County Health Department, Tompkins County Solid Waste Management Division, Cornell University, Lifelong, the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth, TCAT, and the Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility.

Others are supporting the effort including: the Ithaca Police Department, Wegmans, Rite-Aid, Kmart, Purity Ice Cream, and College Town Bagels.

The first collection event organized by CSMD in March of this year set a National record for the weight of medications collected at a one day, one location event!

Who may participate?

ONLY participants with household medications.

Health care facilities, doctor offices, veterinary offices and pharmacies are NOT (by law) covered under this program.

Do I have to be a county resident?

No, you don't. Tompkins County residency is NOT required. If you can make it, we will take it!

What CAN I Bring:

Household medications. This includes prescriptions, controlled substances, over the counter medications, dietary supplements and veterinary medications. These can be in the form of: pills, powders, liquids, vials, sprays, inhalers, gels, ointments, etc.

Please keep your medications in their original containers. You may cross off your name and PERSONAL information ONLY. Please DO NOT cover up or remove the name or the dosage of the medication. All medications and their containers will be incinerated with law enforcement supervision.

What if medication has already been removed from original container?

Simply put the medication in a ziplock type bag for transport to the March 6th collection event.

Do I need to remove pills from blister packs?

No. Please leave medications in their original packaging. Remove personal identifiers from the container. Black magic markers work well.

Can I bring a prescription that is not mine?

Yes, as long as it is not a controlled substance. Controlled substances should never be given to anyone else except at a law enforcement supervised collection event. Note, there is legislation currently under consideration to modify the controlled substances act to allow others, where appropriate, to deliver controlled substances for proper disposal. For more information look up: H.R.5809

You CANNOT Bring:

Household hazardous waste (paint, pesticides, mercury, oil, gas), mercury thermometers, Mercurochrome, or medical sharps (needles, syringes, lances, etc.)

What should I do with mercury thermometers and Mercurochrome?

Bring them to the next household hazardous waste collection event on April 17 at the Tompkins County Solid Waste Transfer Station, 100 Commercial Ave, Ithaca, N.Y.

What should I do with sharps?

There are a number of local drop-off locations for sharps. Bring them to one of the following:

1. Cayuga Medial Center Receiving Dock Area, 274-4114, 7 days a week 7 AM- 3 PM.
2. Groton Community Health Care Center Lobby 898-5876, 7 days a week 8 AM – 4:30 PM. Sat. & Sun. Deliver to 1st flr. Nurses Station.
3. Kendal at Ithaca Resident Care, 266-5332, 3rd Wed. of the Month 10:30 AM – 2:30 PM.
4. Cayuga Ridge Extended Care. Receiving Area, 273-8072, Mon.-Fri. 10:00 AM – 4 PM.

5. Beechtree Care Center. Lobby 273-4166, Mon.-Fri. 9 AM – 3 PM.

http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/aids/harm_reduction/needles_syringes/sharps/docs/tompkins.pdf

Sharps disposal in out of area locations:

http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/aids/harm_reduction/needles_syringes/sharps/directory_sharpscollection.htm#directory

Why is flushing medications bad for the environment?

Medications flushed down the drain contaminate our water bodies and have adverse effects on our environment. Wastewater treatment facilities are not currently designed to remove these contaminants.

Pharmaceuticals -- including antibiotics -- can be found in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans. The concentrations of the pharmaceuticals are small - far below typical medical doses - but studies have found problematic impacts on wildlife and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has acknowledged that the issue is a serious concern.

Why is throwing medications in the trash bad for the environment?

Throwing medications in the trash is also discouraged. It can lead to accidental swallowing by children or pets or could lead to misuse and or abuse. When disposed of in the trash, these chemicals can contaminate the leachate (water that comes in contact with trash) from the landfill. Pharmaceutical contaminated leachate can end up in drinking water supplies.

Why not just hold on to these medications?

There is a risk that someone may take your medications without your knowledge. In fact, teen abuse of pharmaceutical drugs is a growing trend in Tompkins County and across the nation. Teens say they have easy access to prescription and over-the-counter drugs in their own homes, a grandparent's or other relative's home. The best solution is to safeguard drugs you keep in your home and to properly dispose of old or unneeded medicines.

Are expired medications safe?

In order for a company to manufacture a drug, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that they follow good manufacturing practices. Part of this requirement includes specific testing to determine an expiration date for the drug. This date is based on ideal storage conditions away from excessive heat, cold, and humidity. After that date, there is no longer any guarantee that the drug remaining is the amount printed on the label or prescription bottle. The expiration date simply guarantees that the drug will work just as well as when it was initially made. The expiration date for over the counter drugs is printed on the bottle. The expiration date on a prescription filled at a pharmacy is assumed to be 1 year from the date that the prescription was filled, when stored under proper conditions, unless otherwise stated.

A common question regarding expiration dating is whether or not it is "safe" to take drugs after they have expired. Unfortunately, the response to this question is not an easy yes or no answer.

An antibiotic known as tetracycline breaks down over time into known toxic substances that can result in kidney disease and should not be used beyond its expiration date. However, most medications simply decrease in strength over time and may not work as well for their intended purpose because the chemicals that the drug is broken down into are not active. This breakdown is faster in the presence of excessive heat and humidity (such as in a bathroom) or excessive cold (an automobile in winter). This breakdown can occur even before the expiration date, if the medication is left in improper storage conditions like outside in winter or in a car in the summer.

Therefore, it is generally not advised to consume expired medications based on two principles. First, the medication may have lost potency and might not work as expected for its intended purpose. As a result, the disease that the medication is intended to treat may not be adequately controlled. Second, the medication may have started to decompose into toxic substances (i.e. tetracycline) and may be harmful if consumed.

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Why should “returned” medicines not be used for overseas aid?

A. *The World Health Organisation (WHO)* has strongly recommended that the recycling of returned medicines be ceased, for the following reasons:

1. The “integrity” of previously distributed medicines cannot be assured. Strict controls are in place to regulate the manufacture and storage of medicines in the manufacturer, wholesaler and pharmacy environments. Frequent reports of adulterated medicines have reached the media. We should not apply double standards – if we are not to use the medicines, neither should another country.
2. The recipient country often has no knowledge of medicines available in the “sending” country. Brand names differ, and most often the medicines sent are of no use in the circumstances existing in the receiving country.
3. Black Market operations in third world countries are often very active. The interception of drug deliveries is common.

The preferred *WHO* protocol for medicinal aid is:

1. A medical person (doctor, pharmacist or nurse) with authority in the need country prepares a list of specific medicinal requirements.
2. The list includes delivery address requirements, and names of responsible recipients for the medicines.
3. The list is provided to an official Aid organization who contacts manufacturers and

wholesalers direct. The contact seeks donations of required medicines from manufacturers, or at least a heavily discount priced contribution.

4. The required medicines are collected, collated, and delivered to the country in need, and to the specific authority requesting the medicines.

NOTE: A full description of the WHO Guidelines can be accessed at:
www.who.int/hac/techguidance/guidelines_for_drug_donations.pdf

For **more information about pharmaceutical waste:**

[Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#)

[New York State Department of Environmental Conservation \(NYSDEC\)](#)

[Department of Environmental Conservation](#)

[American Society of Consultant Pharmacists](#)

[Finger Lakes Poison and Information Center](#)

For Event Specific Information:

Email: egottlieb@cityofithaca.org or Phone: **Ed Gottlieb**, Pretreatment Coordinator IAWWTF
607-273-8381

Thank you to the Monroe County Dept. of Environmental Services, the USEPA, and Return Unwanted Medicines Project for permission to use their material.