

Waste pharmaceuticals include a wide variety of items, including over-the-counter and prescription medications. These wastes come in the form of solid pills and capsules, creams, liquids and aerosols. Many pharmaceuticals intended for pets are similar or identical to those prescribed to humans and should be treated exactly the same.

Recent United States Geological Survey studies have found traces of painkillers, estrogen, antidepressants, blood-pressure medicines, etc. in water samples from 30 states. Studies have linked hormone exposure to reproductive defects in fish, and environmental exposure to antibiotics to the development of drug-resistant germs.

Don't Flush!

The age-old advice of flushing pharmaceuticals down the toilet is now considered to be the least desirable of all alternatives. For many years many households and businesses have gotten into the habit of flushing waste pharmaceuticals down the toilet or pouring them down the drain because it is low cost and appears to be the simplest way to prevent unintended use or other diversion. However, wastewater treatment plants and septic systems are generally not designed to treat pharmaceutical waste. **So don't flush your waste drugs!**

Illinois EPA Recommended Handling/Disposal Options for Households

1. **Reduce** pharmaceutical waste whenever possible:
 - Use all antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor. Not using all doses of an antibiotic could lead to development of antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria.
 - Buy only as much as can reasonably be used before the expiration date. For example, don't buy 500 aspirin just because it's cheaper, unless you will use them all.
 - When your doctor prescribes a new medication, ask the doctor to prescribe only enough to see if the medication will work for you and in the lowest dose advisable. That way, if the medication doesn't suit you, there is less to waste. Do the same for your pet's medications.
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2. **Dispose** of the remainder properly.
 - Whenever possible, take your unused pharmaceuticals to a pharmaceutical collection program or household hazardous waste event. **Note:** If you choose to store your waste while you wait for a pharmaceutical collection event to occur, please minimize the risk of accidental poisoning, overdose or diversion (illegal use by someone other than the intended person) by storing medications out of reach of children or in a locked cabinet.
 - Dispose of your unused pharmaceuticals in the trash. Especially when there is a risk of accidental poisoning, overdose or diversion, it is better to dispose of household pharmaceuticals than to hang onto them. When placing unused pharmaceuticals in the trash, be sure to do the following:
 - Remove or mark over all labels that identify the materials as pharmaceuticals or that could provide personal information about you, including prescription information that someone could try to refill;
 - Render them unattractive to children and thieves by dissolving them in a small amount of water or alcohol, or by grinding them up and mixing them with coffee grounds or kitty litter; and
 - Put them in a second container or small plastic bag and hide them in your trash.
 - Never burn pharmaceuticals or personal care products in a burn barrel. Uncontrolled burning can create dioxins and other air pollutants.