



Medication and Pharmaceutical Disposal:

Help protect lakes, streams, and our water by properly disposing of prescription and over-the-counter medications. Do not flush medications down the drain. Instead, follow the guidelines below.

Medications flushed down the toilet and poured down the drain can get into the environment. Wastewater treatment plants and septic systems are not designed to remove all medications from wastewater. Pouring drugs down the drain can send the medications to area lakes and streams. Small amounts of antibiotics, anti-depressants, veterinary drugs, birth control hormones and ibuprofen have been detected in waterways across the United States.

Research suggests that the hormones found in pharmaceuticals may cause abnormalities in the reproductive cycles of fish. Antibiotics that are present may also lead to the development of drug-resistant germs, which are linked to antibiotic-resistant bacteria. More research still needs to be done to determine the effects of long-term human exposure, as well as how drugs get into waterways, but the available research suggests that we need to keep medicines out of our waterways.



Photo - Menominee Park on Lake Winnebago. In Winnebago County, contact the Health Department at (920) 232-3000 or email at health@co.winnebago.wi.us for information on upcoming medication disposal programs.

The Wisconsin DNR recommends the following 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 (External Link).
- 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.
- Reconsider the use of products that claim to be antimicrobial or antibacterial. Washing with plain soap and water has been demonstrated to be as effective as using antibacterial soaps. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends plain soap in its handwashing procedure. Antimicrobial agents such as triclosan may harm the environment and any bacteria not killed by the products can contribute to developing antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria.

2. REUSE/RECYCLE drugs when possible.

- Wisconsin allows certain pharmacies to take back unit doses of drugs for cancer and chronic diseases. Certain drugs can be returned for re-issuance through the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services Cancer Drug Repository \(External Link\)](#)
- You may be able to donate other items; however, the circumstances where this is possible are limited. Additional information is provided at the DNR webpage [donating medications and personal care products \(External Link\)](#). Note that it is very unlikely that medications from households would be acceptable for use overseas. If you see an opportunity to do this, approach with caution and research the program well.

3. DISPOSE of the remainder properly.

- Whenever possible, take your unused pharmaceuticals to a pharmaceutical collection program or event. **In Winnebago County, contact the Health Department at (920) 232-3000 or email at health@co.winnebago.wi.us for information on upcoming medication disposal programs.**
- The [UW Extension Solid & Hazardous Waste Education Center \(External Link\)](#) maintains a listing of upcoming pharmaceutical collection events on the SHWEC Web site. Typically these are one-day events. However, some are ongoing or are scheduled to take place on a regular basis, e.g., weekly or monthly. Pharmaceuticals are generally not collected at permanent household hazardous waste collection facilities due to the requirement to have law enforcement and, ideally, trained pharmacists present during the collection.
- **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 **and** in a locked cabinet.
- Never burn pharmaceuticals or personal care products in a burn barrel. Uncontrolled burning can create dioxins and other air pollutants.
- Do not put sharps in the trash! Syringes, lancets and other sharp medical items should be taken to a sharps collection station. To find the location of the nearest sharps collection station or for more information about sharps disposal, visit the [DNR List of Registered Sharps Collection Facilities page \(external link\)](#).



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