

Dispose of Prescription Drugs Properly by Visiting a Collection Site

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Hundreds of Delawareans lose their lives each year to prescription drug abuse. Significantly more suffer behavioral and cognitive impairments and other effects as a result of being under the influence of substances. Those in the vice grip of substance use disorders also risk losing their families, jobs, friendships, and dignity.

It is more important than ever to properly dispose of prescribed and over-the-counter drugs that are expired or no longer needed.

Improperly using prescription drugs can lead to addiction and overdose. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), more than 70 percent of people abusing prescription pain relievers obtain them through friends or relatives, or by raiding medicine cabinets.¹ Some people may also raid trash cans. Youth are particularly vulnerable. One in five high school students have abused prescription drugs² and twice as many Americans regularly abused prescription drugs than the number who regularly used cocaine, hallucinogens, heroin, and inhalants combined, the DEA reported in 2015.³

Prescription opioids are also a known gateway to abusing illegal substances, particularly heroin.⁴ According to DEA statistics, eight out of 10 new heroin users began by abusing prescription painkillers and when they could no longer obtain or afford them, started using heroin.

Youth are especially at risk for developing substance abuse disorders. Nearly 70 percent of those who try an illicit drug before the age of thirteen develop a substance use disorder in the next seven years, according to the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.³ Although some will connect to treatment services, others may succumb to addiction. The Division of Public Health (DPH) reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that 293 people died in Delaware from drug overdoses (accidental, intentional and unknown intent) in 2016, compared to 214 in 2015 and 201 in 2014, according to the DPH Health Statistics Center.⁵

Additionally, when expired and unused medications remain in the home, they can lead to accidental poisonings of children, pets, and adults. In 2015, 60 percent of unintentional poisonings were drug-induced, according to the Delaware Vital Statistics Annual Report, 2015.

National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day is a twice-annual event that provides safe, convenient, and responsible sites for the anonymous disposal of used, expired, or unwanted prescription drugs.

The State of Delaware, medical centers, police departments, pharmacies, and hospitals participate. Since 2010, Delawareans donated 76,474 pounds of unwanted prescription medications through these successful events.⁶ Under the Controlled Substances Act, household members can dispose of their own household's pharmaceutical controlled substances.

Disposing of medications from other households is not permitted as the Act defines ultimate users as "a person who has lawfully obtained, and who possesses, a controlled substance for his own use or for the use of a member of his household or for an animal owned by him or a member of his household."⁷

While Drug Take Back Day events are successful opportunities for persons to rid themselves of unwanted medications, it was believed that there needed to be a similar solution year-round.

The Prescription Drug Action Committee (now reconstituted as the Addiction Action Committee) recommended to the establishment of permanent drug disposal sites, and 21 collection sites now exist at various police stations and Walgreens pharmacies: six in New Castle County, seven in Kent County,⁸ and eight in Sussex County. For the full list of Delaware collection sites, visit <http://delawarehealthyhomes.org>.

Drug Disposal Instructions

When disposing drugs at permanent collection sites or Drug Take-Back Day events, leave liquid medications in their original containers. Other drugs should be in pill bottles, boxes, blister packs, or zip-top or sealable plastic bags with prescription labels and personal identifying information marked out with a felt-tip marker. Needles, aerosols, biohazard materials, medical equipment, batteries, and syringes are prohibited from these disposal sites. Businesses such as medical clinics or pharmacies must not use these drop boxes but instead must follow Federal Regulation 21CFR1307.21 for disposal of unwanted stock.⁹

Needles, lancets, and other sharps should be placed in strong plastic containers with lids sealed with duct tape. Delawareans should dispose of sharps containers in the regular trash, or they can take them to the Delaware Solid Waste Authority's (DSWA) household hazardous waste collection events.¹⁰ For more information, call the Citizen's Response Line at 1-800-404-7080 or visit the DSWA's website at <http://dswa.com>.

Delawareans who are unable to bring their unused or expired medicines to a proper disposal site can dispose of them in their household trash following these procedures.¹¹ First, mix the medicines (do not crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable substance such as dirt, kitty litter, or used coffee grounds. Place the mixture in a container such as a zip-top or sealable plastic bag, and discard the sealed container in the household trash. Remember to use a felt-tip marker to make personal information on prescription labels unreadable.

Substance Use Disorder Treatment

Those struggling with substance use disorders, or who are trying to connect others to treatment resources, can call 24/7 Services at 1-800-652-2929 in New Castle County, or 1-800-345-6785 in Kent and Sussex counties. For a list of Delaware treatment providers as well as for information on identifying the signs of addiction, talking about the subject with loved ones, resources for recovery, and how to administer the overdoes-reversing drug naloxone, visit Delaware's one stop online resource Help Is Here at <http://www.helpisherede.com/>. To learn how to identify controlled substances by photo and their side effects, read *Drugs of Abuse: A DEA Resource Guide*, 2017 edition, published by the U.S. Department of Justice, DEA, at: https://www.dea.gov/pr/multimedia-library/publications/drug_of_abuse.pdf.

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