

Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

Disposing of Prescription Medicines and Over-the-Counter (OTC) Products

Do not flush prescription medicines or OTC products down the sink or toilet!

Although using the toilet or sink prevents someone from accidentally taking the medications, disposing of them in this way causes water pollution and has adverse effects on septic systems, sewage treatment plants, fish and other aquatic wildlife. Trace amounts of all kinds of drugs have also been found in some drinking water supplies because they pass through septic systems and sewage plants untreated.

Safe Disposal Options

Consumers have several options for disposing of prescription medications and OTC products safely. By using these options, you will protect your privacy, discourage unintended consumption of the drugs and protect our water.

Remember to follow these instructions for pet medications, too!

- Follow the [disposal instructions in English](#) or [disposal instructions in Spanish](#) and put them in the trash. In CT, most of our trash is burned at Resource Recovery Facilities at high temperatures which destroy these products.
- Many police stations now have a [Drop Box Drug Disposal program](#). Residents can discard their unwanted or unused medicines in special locked boxes any time the police department lobby is open. Residents do not need to complete forms or answer questions about the items they drop off. (Needles or liquid medications are not accepted.) Check with your local police department to see if they are participating. A **NEW [pharma-disposal drop box locator tool](#)** has been developed by Citizen's Campaign for the Environment.
- Chain pharmacies such as CVS, Walgreens and Rite Aid provide disposal envelopes for prescription and over the counter medicines for a small fee. Ask your pharmacist for details and program restrictions. [Find a pharmacy](#).
- Bring them to a [special collection](#) sponsored by the federal government or town. These are not regularly scheduled and are sometimes only open to residents of the sponsoring town. (Medicines are not accepted at Household Hazardous Waste collections.)

Note: Schools that want to dispose of controlled substances should call the Drug Control Division of the CT Dept. of Consumer Protection for assistance at 860-713-6065.

See the [quick reference chart](#) below for disposal instructions for these medical supplies: [ampoules, vials, & IV bags](#), [chemotherapy drugs](#), [mercury thermometers](#) and [sharps \(needles and lancets\)](#).

More Pollution Prevention Tips For Reducing The Need for Medicine and OTC Disposal

- If possible, ask your doctor to give you a smaller amount of a prescription or a sample of a drug that you are taking for the first time to see if it works for you. This may save you money and will also eliminate the need for throwing the drug away if it doesn't work for you. Do the same for animal prescriptions.
- Look at the expiration date on OTC products. Will you be able to use all of it before the product expires? If not, maybe a smaller amount will do.
- Look into [mail-back programs for sharps](#) or check with your local hospital or pharmacist.
- [The Sustainable Hospitals](#) at UMass Lowell may have resources.

Quick Reference Chart For Disposal Of Medical Supplies

Products	Best Way To Dispose
Ampoules, Vials, & IV Bags	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not empty or open the bags. • Wrap the container with tape to minimize breakage, then place in an opaque plastic container (such as an empty yogurt or margarine tub). • Wrap the outside of the container or bag with additional duct or shipping tape to prevent leakage to further obscure the contents. • Dispose of the container in the trash. DO NOT put the container in your recycling bin!
Chemotherapy drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some chemotherapy drugs may have special disposal requirements. Ask your health care provider about proper disposal.
Mercury thermometers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring to a household hazardous waste (HHW) collection or call your town's recycling contact or public works. DO NOT put the thermometer in your trash. • Find an HHW collection date and location nearest you. • Learn how to safely clean-up a broken mercury thermometer.
Sharps (needles and lancets)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place in a puncture-proof, hard plastic container with a screw-on cap, like a bleach or detergent bottle. • Seal the container with the original lid and wrap with duct tape. • Place the tightly sealed container in a bag and put it in your trash. DO NOT put the container in your recycling bin! • As an alternative, look into mail back programs or check with your local hospital or pharmacist.

The DEEP does not endorse any products or companies. Contact vendors directly to purchase a product or to obtain more information.

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