

Physician Counselling Guide

Storage and Disposal of Opioids

Poisonings happen when drugs are left accessible to children and pets, or when they are mistaken for other medications.

Patients are often prescribed opioid doses in excess of what they need, leading to accumulation of these drugs and increasing the potential of diversion or theft or accident.

Patients are not routinely counselled about the risks of poor storage and the necessity of proper disposal.



Here's what to tell patients

- The medication you are prescribed can be dangerous to others - even a single dose can be very harmful.
- Bring back any unused medications to your pharmacy or look for special medication disposal programs in your community.
- Check your medicine cabinets and return any expired or unused medications, including over-the-counter drugs. Any drug or bottle that cannot be identified should also be returned.
- Avoid keeping medications in plain sight or in a purse - you need to keep these drugs hidden, out of reach, and ideally locked up in a box or cabinet.
- It is dangerous to keep extra medications or medications you don't need anymore because they may be accidentally taken or purposefully stolen.
- Don't throw out unused doses in the garbage as they still may be stolen or accidentally taken by children or pets. Flushing medications in the toilet is discouraged unless there is a compelling safety need to quickly dispose of old or unused drugs (e.g., where used patches can be accessed by children or pets).

Here's what to do

- Prescribe a minimum number of opioid doses based on the expected clinical course.
- Ask periodically about any medications the patient has stored at home and encourage proper return.
- Familiarize yourself with medication disposal programs in your area such as drug take-back events or patch return programs.