

# Know, Secure, Dispose—To Prevent Teen Prescription Drug Abuse!

October 24th is National Prescription Drug Takeback Day; a day to rid our medicine cabinets of unused, unwanted, and expired over-the-counter and prescription drugs.

Here's why:

- The most common way young people get their hands on prescription medications for misuse is to simply reach into their home or a grandparent's medicine cabinet.
- Prescription medicines are one of the top drugs of choice among high school students, following alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco.
- Youth who misuse prescription drugs are also more likely to smoke cigarettes, engage in heavy drinking, and use illicit drugs, including marijuana and cocaine.

Prescription drugs are meant to help us, but they can harm our children, ourselves, and others when abused or misused.

Taking a medication prescribed for someone else, taking your own prescription in a way not intended by a doctor, or taking a medication to get high are all considered misuse or abuse. It's important to also note that while it is unsafe to share a prescription medication with a family member or friend, it is also illegal—even when shared with good intentions. A big misperception is that prescription drugs are safer than "street" or illicit drugs because a doctor has prescribed them, when in fact they can be just as dangerous.

## Know, Secure, Dispose to Keep Your Family Safe

To prevent the misuse of over-the-counter and prescription drugs and to keep our families and communities safe, follow these three, simple steps: **know, secure, dispose**.

**Know:** The first step in prescription drug safety is to know about the medicines in your home.

Keep track of which medicines are in your house, how many doses you have of each medicine, and how often you should be getting refills on your prescriptions. If you're refilling prescriptions more often than expected, it could be a sign of misuse occurring in the home. If you have children, even teenagers, in the home, control their medication use and monitor doses and refills. Be sure to track the name, dosage, and appearance of the medicine as well as how it is taken, who takes it, why they take it, and how often and when it is taken.

**Secure:** Nine out of ten poisonings of children 12 years old and younger involve medicine, according to Prevent Child Injury. And, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, medicine is also the most likely toxin to poison pets at home.

It is vital for the safety of our families to properly store and secure our medications. Safely storing medicine means that it is kept out of reach and sight of young children as well as in a

locked cabinet or lockbox that is not easily accessed by children, neighbors, or other guests to prevent misuse.

**Dispose:** Old, expired, or no longer needed medicines can represent a health risk at home, but many people are unsure how to properly get rid of these medications. Fortunately, there are multiple ways to dispose of them, while keeping families, communities, and the environment safe.

## **How To Safely Dispose of Medicines**

- Take advantage of National Prescription Drug Take Back Day or local take back days to safely dispose of medicine.
- Use a prescription drug drop box.
- Use an at-home prescription drug deactivation pouch to deactivate the drugs and then throw them away in the trash.
- If no other methods are available, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends mixing the medicine with an unappealing substance, like cat litter or coffee grounds, placing them into a sealed container, and throwing the container into the trash.
- Remember to black out any personal information on prescription medicine bottles to protect your identity and privacy.

Know, secure, and dispose—following these three simple steps are key actions in protecting your children and other loved ones in your home from the dangers of medicine misuse. In the tip to follow we'll dig deeper into this with a look at why young people misuse medications, how to talk to your child on the subject, and what to do if you suspect or know your child is abusing prescription drugs.

You can [\*\*locate a prescription and over-the-counter drug collection site near you\*\*](#) using the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency online site search tool.

It is also a good idea to keep these numbers handy: **Poison Control (1-800-222-1222)**, and, if you have pets in your home, the **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (1-888-426-4435)**.

If you're concerned about you or someone else, get help at [\*\*findtreatment.gov\*\*](#).

## **Sources**

[U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency: Prescription for Disaster: How Teens Abuse Medicine, Third Edition.](#)

[U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Where and How to Dispose of Unused Medicines.](#)