

March 4, 2025

## Medication Return Q&A

Throwing unused medication in the trash or flushing down the toilet is harmful to the environment. Medications that are flushed or poured down the drain can end up polluting our waters, adversely affecting fish and aquatic wildlife, and contaminating our water supply. Most medications are not removed by the wastewater treatment plant process.

### 1. Why is it important not to flush or pour medication down drains?

Throwing unused medication in the trash or flushing down the toilet is harmful to the environment. Medications that are flushed or poured down the drain can end up polluting our waters, adversely affecting fish and aquatic wildlife, and contaminating our water supply. Most medications are not removed by the wastewater treatment plant process.

### 2. What happens to medication that is returned to a pharmacy (what does the pharmacy do with it)?

Medications are disposed of at a facility where they are incinerated in a way that they are no longer considered an environmental hazard. [https://emerald.foundation.ca/aef\\_awards/envirx/](https://emerald.foundation.ca/aef_awards/envirx/)

### 3. Aren't medications removed from the water system during treatment?

Be assured that the wastewater treatment plant is operating properly to ensure that wastewater is treated to meet government rules and standards. The raw wastewater goes through different treatment processes before being released into the Red Deer River. This creates better water quality for downstream users and prevents disease in human and aquatic life.

Treatment of complex chemicals, such as pharmaceuticals, is something that has historically not been done as the technology is often unproven in large scale treatment systems. Recently, people have become more aware of the potential risk of these chemicals in our drinking water and the City is monitoring advances in technology to see what is being proven successful and how we can consider implementation

### 4. How do you return your medicine?

- Leave liquid and powder medicines in their original containers.
- When returning needles, they must be in a SHARPS container and not mixed with any other medications.
- Remove capsules or tablets from vials or blister packaging and place them in a sealed plastic bag.
- Take medicine to the pharmacy counter. For privacy, remove any identifying labels or information.

### 5. Does this include all pharmacies?

You can find a list of participating pharmacies listed on the [Alberta Pharmacists' Association \(RxA\) website](#).

### 6. Is this program only for a short period?

No, this program is year-round.

**7. Does this program accept all items?**

Currently this program accepts prescriptions, over the counter medications, medicated ointments and lotions, vitamins and supplements, inhalers and EpiPens.

Expired, unused and unwanted pet medications can be dropped off for free, year-round at participating veterinary hospitals.

**8. Why can't I just throw out unused, or expired medication in the landfill?**

Throwing unused medication in the trash or flushing down the toilet is harmful to the environment. Medication in household garbage can be easily accessible to children, pets and wildlife. Once the medications reach the landfill, it can still eventually end up in our water supply through landfill leachate. Landfill leachate is generally sent to the wastewater treatment plant to be treated; unfortunately, most medications are not removed by the wastewater treatment plant process.

**9. Where can I find more information?**

For more information on the Medication Return Program and other programs that support environmental protection check out [Environmental Rebates & Action](#)