

## Dispose of old medicines safely

The last time you cleaned out your cabinets, you may have wondered what to do with medicine bottles and packages you no longer needed. Next time, you can dispose of them safely and free of charge by taking them to your neighbourhood pharmacy.

Most pharmacies in B.C. participate in the Medications Return Program. Expired and unused medications can be returned to these pharmacies at any time for environmentally responsible disposal.

Safe disposal is important. It keeps drugs out of the hands of children and other people who might use them inappropriately. It keeps drugs out of landfill sites and water supplies. And it prevents the inadvertent use of expired medications.

This program is “very effective,” according to Mr. Rick Leigh, a pharmacist who oversees drugstore pharmacies in B.C. for Westfair Drugs Ltd. “There is no cost to the public. And many people do return old medications to their local pharmacies, most frequently when their relatives pass away and the medications are no longer needed, but also when their drug regimens are changed by their physicians, or when they ask pharmacists how to dispose of expired drugs.”

But some people may be unaware of this environmentally responsible option, and others may forget. Leigh says reminders are important. “When people are reminded about the program, they participate.”

A wide range of unused medications, including prescription drugs, nonprescription and herbal products, and vitamin and mineral supplements, are accepted by pharmacies. Consumers are advised to remove from their shelves and take to participating pharmacies all medications that have exceeded their expiry dates and, if the expiry date is no longer clear, to remove:

- All unused or expired prescription drugs and medications;
- Any medicine in questionable condition;
- Throat lozenges;
- Vitamin and mineral supplements
- Medicine whose use is uncertain; and
- Medicine with incomplete or missing labels.

The Medications Return Program is a product stewardship initiative funded by the pharmaceutical and self-care health products industries. More information can be obtained at [www.medicationsreturn.ca](http://www.medicationsreturn.ca), or by contacting the Recycling Hotline of B.C. at 604-732-9253 (Greater Vancouver) or 1-800-667-4321 (outside Greater Vancouver).