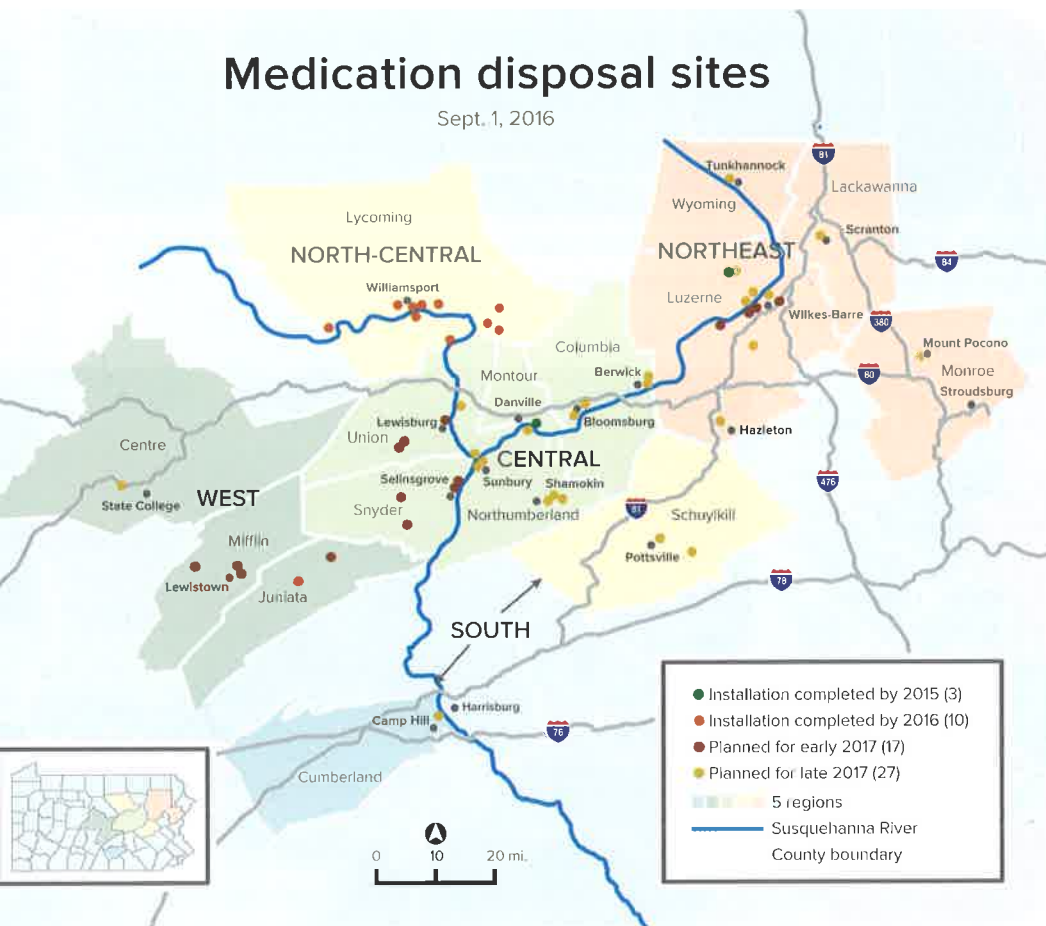


Leftover medications? Here's a safe and easy way to dispose of them

Don't flush or toss unneeded medications or leave them in your medicine cabinet! A new Geisinger Health System program is putting take-back boxes in drugstores and supermarkets throughout central and northeast Pennsylvania.

Medication disposal sites

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depression to high cholesterol and breathing problems.

There's danger lurking in leftover medicines. "They can lead to accidental poisonings in children and to addiction and overdoses in teens and adults," says John R. Jones, RPh, vice president of Enterprise Pharmacy for Geisinger Health System. "It's wise to dispose of medications you and your loved ones aren't using anymore."

But throwing them in the trash or flushing them down the toilet can cause water pollution that harms the environment, Mr. Jones says.

Geisinger has a solution. The health system is installing medication take-back boxes in our own pharmacies and in supermarkets and independent drugstores throughout central and northeast Pennsylvania. Look for the blue-and-white boxes at the pharmacies inside the Knapper Clinic and

Are there leftover medications in your cabinets at home? You're not alone. In a recent Geisinger Center for Health Research study, one out of four people said they had unused prescription drugs at home. The list includes pain pills, antibiotics and medications for everything from high blood pressure and

Bush Pavilion at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville; at Geisinger's CareSite Pharmacy in Dallas; in the Townville Pharmacy at Ben Franklin in Muncy; and in five Weis Markets throughout Lycoming County: Muncy, Montoursville, Jersey Shore and two in Williamsport communities. In late

summer and early fall 2016, boxes will be added to three additional independent pharmacies in Lycoming County and several more Weis Markets and independent pharmacies in Union, Snyder, Montour and Northumberland counties, as well as five Geisinger CareSite Pharmacies in Juniata and Mifflin Counties. Further expansion plans for 2017 include community pharmacies (Weis Markets, Geisinger CareSite and independent pharmacies) in Centre, Cumberland, Schuylkill, Columbia, Luzerne, Wyoming, Lackawanna and Monroe counties.

“Our ultimate goal is to have MedSafe disposal boxes in 57 locations in 2017 across 15 counties,” says Eric A. Wright, PharmD, MPH, co-director of the Center for Pharmacy Innovation and Outcomes at Geisinger.

The boxes accept prescription and over-the-counter pills and capsules as well as liquid medicines, prescription patches, medical creams and ointments, vitamins, nasal sprays and even pet medications. The Geisinger medication take-back project is one of the first hospital programs in Pennsylvania to accept controlled substances. These include narcotic pain killers like codeine, oxycodone, morphine and tramadol. “These drugs are highly addictive. Until now, the only way to dispose of them was at take-back days sponsored by the PA Drug Enforcement Agency or at local police stations. Those are good ways to get rid of leftover medicines, but not always convenient,” Dr. Wright says. “Our goal is for people in central and northeast Pennsylvania to be able to dispose of unneeded medicines within a 10-minute drive from their home, whether it’s at a pharmacy, supermarket or police station.”

The metal drug-disposal boxes look like mailboxes, but they’re secure. “They’re bolted to the floor,” Mr. Jones says. “Once you put medications inside, they cannot be pulled out.” Law enforcement agencies in the various communities empty the boxes and work with the National Guard to transport the drugs to an incinerator for safe disposal.

Protecting the environment, saving lives

“We were hearing about problems with the smallmouth bass in the Susquehanna River. The fish were developing male and female reproductive features, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission warned. Experts think one big reason is traces of medications, including hormones and hormone-disrupting medications, in the water,” says Homer “Skip”

Wieder, emeritus vice president for Development for Geisinger Health System and director of the Susquehanna River Heartland Coalition for Environmental Studies. “Throughout Pennsylvania, district attorneys, local police and healthcare professionals were also becoming more concerned about addiction and overdoses involving narcotics.”

Geisinger’s original drug take-back program started in just three hospital-system pharmacies in 2012. It began accepting controlled substances in 2015, an important milestone, after getting the necessary permissions. So far, more than 4,380 pounds of medications have been collected.

“This can save lives,” says Dr. Wright.

Partnerships make the program possible. “We are working closely with Weis Markets, with the Medicine Shoppe in Williamsport, Montgomery’s Pharmacies in Hughesville and Montgomery, and the Townville Pharmacy at Ben Franklin in Muncy,” Dr. Wright says. “And we have funding from the Williamsport Lycoming Community Fund at the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania and the Degenstein Foundation. We also have research partnerships with Bucknell University, Susquehanna University and Wilkes University to study medication disposal methods and outcomes.” The Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association, local law enforcement and the National Guard are other key partners. And a recent Cardinal

Health Foundation grant will let Geisinger staff work with students from Wilkes and from Pittston Area Senior High School to promote community awareness about leftover medications and the take-back program.

Researchers from Geisinger and Bucknell University estimate that Pennsylvania medication take-back programs saved 28 lives in 2015 by preventing overdoses. “Drug overdoses are responsible for more accidental deaths than any other cause in our country,” says Lorraine Tusing, research project manager at the Center for Pharmacy Innovation and Outcomes. “In addition, 80 percent of heroin users began by abusing prescription drugs. We want to demonstrate the benefits of this take-back program so that it can be a model for others around the United States.” –S.H.



Find the location of the nearest Geisinger medication disposal box online. Go to geisinger.org and search for “Take-back program.”