

Keep unused meds out of the hands of addicts

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(HealthDay)—As America grapples with an opioid epidemic, it has

become even more important to dispose of your leftover prescription medications properly, one pharmacist says.

"Many people don't realize that simply throwing away leftover medications or flushing them down the toilet is actually very dangerous," said Karen Youmbi, manager of [pharmacy](#) regulatory surveillance and outpatient pharmacies at Cedars-Sinai, in Los Angeles.

"People suffering from [substance abuse disorders](#) may scour trash cans for drugs, and flushed substances can end up in the water supply," she explained in a Cedars Sinai news release.

Keeping unused drugs also is risky because others could get their hands on them, including children.

The most common prescription medicines that result in excess doses include those for pain, chronic heart issues, anxiety or depression, according to Youmbi.

You should read the medication's label and follow any disposal instructions, she advised.

Find a [medication](#) take-back location, such as a local pharmacy, where you can anonymously deposit unused medications in a drop box.

Check the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's website for a nearby take-back location, or contact your local sheriff's department or area trash and recycling program for other options.

If there are no disposal instructions on the label and you can't find a take-back program, here's what you should do. Grind up the leftover pills, and mix them with used coffee grounds, dirt or cat litter. This makes it harder for children, pets or people looking through trash to find the

medications.

Put the mixture in a can with a lid or a sealable bag to avoid spillage.

Recycle the plastic pill bottles, but remember to remove the prescription label or scratch out [personal information](#) to protect your privacy and avoid [identity theft](#).

Rita Shane, chief pharmacy officer and professor of medicine at Cedars-Sinai, said, "By following these simple disposal instructions, we can help keep our community safe."

More information: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has more on [medication disposal](#).

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